

**BEYOND COMING OUT:
LESBIANS' STORIES OF SEXUAL IDENTITY
IN THE CONTEXT OF A HISTORICALLY
WHITE UNIVERSITY**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER'S BY THESIS
IN PSYCHOLOGY**

of

RHODES UNIVERSITY

by

ALEXANDRA FARREN GIBSON

Supervisor: Prof Catriona Macleod
Co-Supervisor: Dr Clifford van Ommen

May 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My particular thanks goes to the Andrew Mellon Foundation, the Ernst and Ethel Eriksen Trust and the National Research Foundation for the financial aid that has made this research project possible.

Thanks to both of my supervisors, Catriona and Clifford, for their constant support and advice throughout my project. I have learnt a great deal from both of them. Particular thanks to Catriona, for the last several years of input and supervision.

Thank you to all of my friends who have encouraged me during difficult periods. I especially thank Tracy, who has not only been an incredibly supportive friend, but has been my mentor, fellow researcher, and helped me to wade through the “brain molasses”.

Thanks especially to Mum, for her unending supply of words of encouragement and for always believing in me, and to Dad, who will always guide and protect me in all that I do. Thanks also to the Castel and Tyfield families for their love and support from afar.

Special thanks to Susie, for her love, encouragement, and support during this project. Thanks for putting up with my stress, for listening to my constant flow of consciousness and theorising, and for making the bad days better.

Lastly, thanks especially to the women who participated in this study, for their courage and willingness to share their stories.

ABSTRACT

Substantial contributions have been made by lesbian and gay developmental theorists in understanding the development of lesbian and gay sexual identities, or what has come to be known as the coming out process. “Coming out of the closet” has become a central metaphor, in western contexts, for the recognisable process gay men and lesbians undergo in order to claim a relatively stable and enduring sexual identity, while overcoming obstacles such as heterosexism. Lesbians’ sexual identities are examined in this thesis through a Foucauldian lens which is fused with a narrative-discursive perspective. The aim of this study is not to trace a progressive development of identity, but rather to consider how lesbians in this study are located within a specific context, namely, a historically white university in post-apartheid South Africa, and how their identities are dynamic products of ever-shifting socio-historical spaces. Eight lesbians’ stories are analysed using the narrative-discursive method, which allows for a consideration for how the construction and negotiation of identities is shaped and constrained by social and discursive conditions. The women in this study do utilise the concept of coming out to some extent in their stories, but this narrative does not entirely account for their experiences. Instead, these women’s accounts reflect the way in which they personally experience heterosexism, and how they constantly negotiate their sexual identities within certain social and geographical spaces. When the nuances of lesbians’ contexts are taken into account, it becomes clear that claiming a lesbian identity is more than just about “coming out”, and rather about an on-going process of identity management.

Contents

	Page
Title Page	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
 CHAPTER 1: HOMOSEXUALITY AND HETEROSEXISM IN AFRICA	 1
 1.1. Constructions of homosexuality/same-sex practices in Africa	 1
1.1.1. Legal prohibition of same-sex practices	1
1.1.2. Homosexuality is “unAfrican”	2
1.1.3. “A scourge against Christian teachings”	3
 1.2. Homosexuality in South Africa	 5
1.2.1. The apartheid era: legal sanctions	5
1.2.1.1. Variation in the lesbian and gay subculture	6
1.2.1.2. Mobilisation against apartheid laws	8
1.2.2. Post-apartheid South Africa: continuing a history of violence	9
1.2.3. Transformation at a historically white university	11
 1.3. Approaches to understanding (homo)sexual identities	 15
 1.4. Theoretical framework: a narrative-discursive approach	 17
1.4.1. Analysing stories of sexual identity	18
 1.5. Overall structure	 19
 CHAPTER 2: COMING OUT: THE ACQUISITION OF A (HOMO)SEXUAL IDENTITY	 21
 2.1. The discourse of “coming out”	 22
2.1.1. Historical context of the “coming out” discourse	22
2.1.2. The coming out story: counternarrative to heteronormativity	23
 2.2. Coming out models	 25
2.2.1. Cass (1979)	25
2.2.2. Troiden (1988)	30
 2.3. Views of (homo)sexual identity from a developmental perspective	 32
2.3.1. “Coming out” as a universal pattern	33
2.3.1.1. Gender	33

2.3.1.2. Social milieu: race, culture, politics	34
2.3.2. Importance of self-disclosure	36
2.3.3. Acquisition of an authentic, unchanging sexual identity	38
2.4. Conclusion	39
CHAPTER 3: CONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATION OF (HOMO)SEXUAL IDENTITIES	41
3.1. Negotiations and variations of sexual identity	41
3.1.1. Fluidity of sexuality	42
3.1.2. Contexts of disclosure	44
3.2. Life in a heteronormative world: homophobia/heterosexism	46
3.2.1. Family and the home environment	47
3.2.2. School and university	48
3.2.3. Community	50
3.3. Heterosexist oppression of lesbians	52
3.4. Sexual identity and (non)disclosure	54
3.4.1. Strategies of (non)disclosure	55
3.5. Sexual identity management	57
3.5.1. Questioning the closet	57
3.5.2. Normalisation and routinisation	59
3.6. Conclusion	62
CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL ORIENTATION: NARRATIVE-DISCURSIVE APPROACH	63
4.1. Narrative perspectives of identity	64
4.1.1. Psychosocial perspective	64
4.1.2. Storied resource perspective	67
4.2. Narrative as construction	68
4.2.1. Discursive resources	69
4.2.1.1. Interpretative repertoires	69
4.2.1.2. Canonical narratives	71
4.2.2. Structure of narratives	72

4.2.3. Contextual influences on narrative construction	75
4.3. Narratives as resources for identity work	75
4.3.1. Subject positions	76
4.3.2. Identity coherence	77
4.3.3. Identity trouble	78
4.3.4. Rhetorical work	80
4.4. Extending the narrative-discursive approach	82
4.4.1. Foucauldian analytics of power	83
4.4.2. Disciplinary power	85
4.4.3. Confession	87
4.4.4. Resistance	89
4.5. Conclusion	90
CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY	92
5.1. Theoretical orientation	92
5.2. Research questions	94
5.3. Participants	95
5.3.1. Sampling	95
5.3.2. Participant characteristics	97
5.3.3. Context	98
5.4. Data collection	99
5.5. Data analysis	103
5.6. Ethical considerations	107
5.7. Ensuring transparency and transferability through reflexivity	110
5.8. Conclusion	113
CHAPTER 6: RESULTS: THE COMING OUT STORY	114
6.1. The coming out canonical narrative: developing a sexual identity	116
6.1.1. Gay since young	117

6.1.2. Distress and loneliness	121
6.1.3. Supportive gay community	123
6.1.4. Realisation	125
6.1.5. Naturalness	127
6.1.6. Confession	129
6.2. Conclusion	134
CHAPTER 7: RESULTS: HETEROSEXISM, RESISTANCE AND NORMALISATION	135
7.1. Narrative of heterosexism	135
7.1.1. “Spectacle”	136
7.1.2. Interpersonal/familial heterosexism	139
7.1.3. Institutional heterosexism	142
7.1.4. Race and space	143
7.2. Narratives of resistance	147
7.2.1. Strategies of resistance	147
7.2.2. (Non)disclosure	150
7.3. Canonical narrative of normalisation	154
7.3.1. Normalisation	155
7.3.2. Routinisation	159
7.4. Conclusion	164
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION	155
8.1. Review of the findings	166
8.1.1. “Coming out”: shaping lesbian subjectivity	166
8.1.2. Restrictions on lesbian subjectivity and storytelling	168
8.2. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research	171
8.3. Concluding remarks	172
REFERENCE LIST	173
APPENDIX 1: E-mail to potential participants	187
APPENDIX 2: Preliminary questionnaire for involvement	188

APPENDIX 3: Consent form	190
APPENDIX 4: Transcription codes	191
APPENDIX 5: Interview guidelines	192

CHAPTER ONE

HOMOSEXUALITY AND HETEROSEXISM IN AFRICA

*We, lesbian women, are born here in Africa, we belong here.
Who can say we are unAfrican? (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005, p. 22)*

The aim of this study is to present the stories of South African women who identify, to varying degrees, as lesbian. This exploration of women's narratives of sexual identity is vital, when one considers the ways in which women, and lesbians in particular, have been silenced both in South Africa and in wider African contexts. The first section of this chapter, shall address how same-sex practices have been constructed in Africa, and the range of heterosexist responses to homosexuality that have shaped the lives of lesbians, gay men and bisexual (LGB) people around the continent. This leads to a discussion, in the second section, of the social and legislative background regarding homosexuality in South Africa. Following this, the current socio-historical context shall be considered, especially in light of the violence that LGB people appear to face in South Africa. The issue of transformation shall also be addressed, specifically for the way in which it is occurring in one particular historically white university, which shall provide insight into the context in which this study was conducted. Having provided an account of the socio-historical and political backdrop, the rest of the chapter shall outline the methodological and theoretical perspective which was taken in this study.

1.1. Constructions of homosexuality/same-sex practices in Africa

Similar patterns in heterosexist responses to same-sex sexuality have emerged throughout the African continent. In this section, I shall show how a discourse of heterosexism has been deployed and how it ultimately shapes the lives of LGB people in Africa. Firstly, I shall explain the ways in which same-sex practices in Africa have been consistently denied and prohibited through legal measures. I shall discuss, secondly, two ways in which homosexuality has been constructed as "unAfrican" and "unchristian", and how these constructions have been employed to justify heterosexist practices and policies.

1.1.1. Legal prohibition of same-sex practices

The prohibition of same-sex practices has been implemented in many African countries. In Uganda, punishment for engaging in same-sex practices (predominantly men having sex with

men) can involve life imprisonment (Nagadya & Morgan, 2005). For example, President Yoweri Musaveni has been reported as ordering the police to “‘lock up homosexuals’” (Reddy, 2002, p. 169). Similarly, in Kenya, laws are in place against the practice of sex between men, which is described as “carnal knowledge against the order of nature”, and can incur a sentence of five to fourteen years imprisonment (Baraka & Morgan, 2005, p. 25). “Police round ups” have been occurring in Tanzania, and after an amendment to the law in April 2004, life imprisonment is now a form of punishment for people who engage in sex with others of the same sex (Mohamed & Wieringa, 2005, p. 53). In Namibia, homosexuality has been constructed in much the same way as in Kenya, in that it is criminalised and worded as “unnatural sexual offences” or “crimes of sodomy” (Isaacks & Morgan, 2005, p. 77). Again, punishment can take the form of imprisonment or deportation in Namibia (Isaacks & Morgan, 2005). The ruling party in Namibia, SWAPO, exemplifies this position in a statement, “Homosexuality deserves a severe contempt and disdain from the Namibian people and should be uprooted totally as a practice” (Mail & Guardian, 1997, as cited in Reddy, 2002, p. 169). In Swaziland, same-sex practices are rendered taboo in both customary and western law, although few LGB people have been arrested for engaging in same-sex practices (Khumalo & Wieringa, 2005). Evidently, LGB people around Africa face legal repercussions for their sexuality and are positioned as “criminal”, both through laws and the public statements of political leaders, for acting on their desire. I shall now turn to other ways in which homosexuality is discursively constructed.

1.1.2. Homosexuality is “unAfrican”

Political leaders around Africa have circulated and entrenched the notion that homosexuality is “alien to African culture and an import from the depraved West” (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005, p. 17). Traditional leaders in South Africa, for instance, have described same-sex marriage (and therefore homosexuality) as a “wicked, decadent and immoral Western practice” (National Annual Conference of Traditional Leaders, 2005, as cited in Reid, 2010, p. 44). While drawing on heterosexist discourse, African presidents have labelled same-sex practices as going “against African tradition” and construct homosexuality as originating in European and Western contexts which are said to foster “the deepest level of depravity” (Times of Zambia, 1998, as cited in Reddy, 2002, p. 170).

By constructing homosexuality as a “Western” practice, African political leaders are able to justify the heterosexist positions that they promulgate. Similarly, traditional leaders are positioned as the “voice of the people”, and as the custodians of African culture (Reid, 2010, p. 43). Hence, by speaking from this position of authority, they are able to promote heterosexist beliefs and remain free from censure.

This discourse has frequently circulated in public, and has been spread by political leaders openly making statements that construct homosexuality, and same-sex marriage, as “unAfrican”. For instance, former President of Kenya, Daniel Arap Moi, claimed that “Homosexuality is against African norms and traditions” (Baraka & Morgan, 2005, p. 25). In 2006, Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, declared that same-sex unions were “unnatural and unAfrican”, while traditional leaders in South Africa have claimed that same-sex marriage goes “against most of African beliefs, cultures, customs and traditions” (National Annual Conference of Traditional leaders, 2005, as cited in Reid, 2010, p. 44). In Uganda, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Namibia, not only have presidents publicly vocalised their repugnance of homosexuality, but, as shown above, they have also established these beliefs through heterosexist policies (Ratele, 2006). These leaders have also frequently constructed homosexuality as a “sinful” act which appears to go against Christian beliefs.

1.1.3. “A scourge against Christian teachings”

Notably, African leaders, and those who draw on the “unAfrican” discourse, also regularly construct homosexuality (a supposedly “Western” import) as “unchristian”; thereby appropriating a Western religion to criticise “foreign” practices (Horn, 2006; Reddy, 2002; Reid, 2010). As Horn (2006) points out, this discourse of homosexuality as “unchristian” is justified through laws which criminalise “unnatural” sex, and the Bible, which were both colonial imports (p. 13). Both Catholic and Protestant religious leaders have supported the construction of homosexuality as a sin (Baraka & Morgan, 2005), and this sentiment has been further entrenched through “a new wave of US-driven Pentecostal evangelism” in Africa (Horn, 2006, p. 13).

In Swaziland, an LGB group, GALESWA, has faced criticism from traditionalists who construct homosexuality as both “unAfrican” and “unchristian”, saying, “homosexuality is ‘ungodly, unSwazi and unacceptable’” (Hlatshwayo, 1997, as cited in Reddy, 2002, p. 169). Same-sex

marriage, similarly, has been constructed as “unchristian” in that it is “non-procreative”, and therefore goes against Biblical teachings around reproduction (Reid, 2010, p.40). Notably, in some African cultures, same-sex marriages are practised, for example, in the Kikuyu, Kisu, Kamba, and Kalenjin tribes in Kenya (Baraka & Morgan, 2005). However, same-sex sexuality within these marriages is considered taboo – owing to both the cultural and (Christian) religious beliefs that structure Kenyan society (Baraka & Morgan, 2005).

In Morgan and Wieringa’s (2005) narrative collection of lesbians’ experiences in Africa, the authors highlight how Christianity (often combined with traditional beliefs) frequently creates difficulties for lesbians and shapes the ways that they speak about themselves. For instance, one woman in Namibia reflects on her family’s beliefs saying, “Ja, it is wrong... definitely, yes, it’s (sic) a sin” (Isaacks & Morgan, 2005, p. 92). Similarly, Tanzanian women who were interviewed explained, “we are considered to be immoral and satanic” (Mohamed & Wieringa, 2005, p. 53), while a woman in Kenya describes “feeling like a sinner” (Baraka & Morgan, 2005, p. 39).

In 1998, Zimbabwean President, Robert Mugabe (Reuters, 1998, as cited in Reddy, 2002), stated, “Will God not punish us because of such practices?”, thus applying Christian rhetoric against homosexuality (p. 169). As Reddy (2002) explains, same-sex practices have been recurrently spoken about as immoral, anti-Christian, and satanic in the African context. This is evidenced both in the public statements of political leaders and reflected in the narratives of lesbians around Africa. Ultimately, talk around homosexuality as “unchristian” highlights, to quote Horn (2006), the “prudish and heteronormative discourses of morality” (p. 9), that have circulated in Africa and have reinforced the othered status of same-sex sexuality.

Combining the public statements of leaders with the legal prohibitions of homosexuality, it appears that many African countries allow for “legally mandated homophobic intolerance” (Horn, 2006, p. 7). This institutional and social heterosexism has been circulated through talk around homosexuality as “unAfrican” and “unchristian”, which has, in turn, justified heterosexist practices. It is frequently political, religious and traditional leaders who put forward these views, and given their positions of power, they inform how homosexuality is (not) tolerated on a societal level. Having considered how homosexuality has been constructed in the broader African context,

I shall now discuss the social and historical changes within South Africa with regard to same-sex practices.

1.2. Homosexuality in South Africa

Living as a lesbian or as a gay man in South Africa has changed substantially since the move to democracy in 1994. In this section, I shall firstly outline the ways in which homosexuality was prohibited both socially and legally in South Africa during the years of apartheid. I shall also discuss the way in which the experiences of lesbians and gay men differed along racial and social lines, and how despite the lack of unity in this community, played an active role in the anti-apartheid movement. Secondly, I shall describe the transition from apartheid to democracy and how, with a new constitution, this brought promises of equality and acceptance for all, regardless of one's gender, race, or sexuality. Nevertheless, owing to prevailing social ideologies, there remains much to be accomplished. As I shall point out, transformation has been slow, and inequalities continue both on an interpersonal and institutional level. Despite changes in legal policies, heterosexism still permeates the lives of lesbians and gay men in South Africa. In the fourth part of this section, I shall address the ways in which socio-political transformation is taking place within a specific historically white university, and how this shapes the everyday lives of LGB people who live and study in this context.

1.2.1. The apartheid era: legal sanctions

In South Africa, homosexuality has a history of repression which began during the period of colonisation and extended through apartheid rule under laws such as the Immorality Act of 1957 (Christiansen, 2000; Hoad, 2005; Ratele, 2009). During apartheid, the private sphere was placed under public inspection, and the state policed sexual relations between the various sexes and races (Hoad, 2005).

Both the taboo against homosexuality and the strict control of sexual relations in general could be explained by the government's attempt to protect the “‘purity’ of Afrikaners and biblical mandate” (Christiansen, 2000, p. 14). Furthermore, as Ratele (2009) explains, laws such as the Immorality Act had:

social and moral dimensions: stipulations around what it *ought* to mean to be a sexual person and what a Self in the nation in 1950 (and subsequently) was. The Immorality Act played a part in constituting masculinities

and femininities, and so relations between males and females. At the same time, then, it was part of the materials we were given to make personhood in our country (p. 300, emphasis in original).

The gay subculture came under the scrutinization of the Nationalist Party from the mid-1960s onwards, which involved a “vigorous legislative campaign” particularly against gay men and any social activities in the gay community (Retief, 1994, p. 101). At this point, police raids on private parties became common, and after recommendations from the police to the Minister of Justice, PC Pelser, several amendments were made to the Immorality Act in 1969 (Retief, 1994). These changes included the following:

Any sexual acts between men at a party were to be banned; the age of consent for male homosexual acts was to be raised from 16 years to 19; and the manufacture and distribution of any article intended to be used to perform an unnatural sexual act was to be prohibited (Retief, 1994, p. 103).

The focus from the government was on “white” gay men, while lesbians and “black” gay men and women were either ignored or assumed to be marginal (Retief, 1994). This reflects the “white” androcentric viewpoint of the apartheid government.

1.2.1.1. Variation in the lesbian and gay subculture

The gay subculture during apartheid was by no means unified, owing to racial, social and gender differences, which reflected the wider divisions in South Africa (Cock, 2003; Croucher, 2002). For example, the “white” gay male subculture, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, was predominantly apolitical and consisted of “supper clubs, bars, gay-owned businesses and a gay newspaper, EXIT” (Croucher, 2002, p. 317). In addition, (despite the legal sanctions against them) compared to other gay and lesbian people in South Africa, “white” gay men still held a privileged status within a patriarchal, “white” supremacist society (Berman, 1993; Cock, 2003).

The “coloured” communities in the Western Cape, notably, have a rich history of “moffie¹” culture (Croucher, 2002, p. 318). Chetty (1994), for instance, explains that “more than anywhere in South Africa, aspects of gay life like cross-dressing and drag seem to have taken root in the coloured working class communities of the Western Cape” (p. 117). The “moffie” culture was formed around drag, and “moffies” were stereotypically identified as being “effete, theatrical, tragic or

¹ This term, often used in a derogatory way, is a South African slang term for “male homosexual or... transvestite” and has “recently been re-appropriated by homosexuals and transvestites in reference to themselves” (Croucher, 2002, p. 318).

comic” (Chetty, 1994, p. 120). Interestingly, the Cape Carnival – a major cultural event in the “coloured” community – involves challenging conventional gender and sexuality norms, which meant that a space could be provided for this particular expression of sexuality, apparently regardless of the political restrictions that prevailed during apartheid (Chetty, 1994).

The accounts that have emerged about the “black” gay subculture in South Africa have often focused on the experiences of lesbian sangomas², or men having sex with men in the mining community (see Croucher, 2002; Gevisser & Cameron, 1994; Morgan & Wieringa, 2005). Given that “black” men and women were politically and socially subjugated during the apartheid years, “black” gay men and lesbians faced several layers of oppression – of being both “black” and gay. As a result, the focus on attaining gay rights was not central in the “black” gay subculture (Croucher, 2002). Kleinbooi (1994), who was an activist during the later years of apartheid, provides an account of the tensions that he experienced between his multiple identities. For instance, Kleinbooi (1994) describes joining the Black Students Society, while at university during apartheid, where his sexuality was not regarded as “politically relevant”, yet, he found that he was one of the few “black” students who joined the Gay and Lesbian Association (p. 267). Kleinbooi (1994) was met, as a result, with racism within one organisation, and heterosexism in the other. The intersection of one’s racial and sexual identities, therefore, was particularly complicated during the socio-political period of apartheid.

During apartheid, lesbians were positioned as invisible through “underexposure, censorship and patriarchal control” which permeated South African society (Berman, 1993, p. xvii). Although women’s organisations did form during apartheid, they focused on economic and political matters, and did not address issues of sexuality, thus providing little support for lesbians (Cock, 2003; Gevisser, 1994).

Lesbians feared being “out” (Berman, 1993), and faced “far greater pressure to remain closeted” (Gevisser, 1994, p. 19) than their male counterparts, who could at least enjoy the privileged status of masculinity. Gevisser (1994) notes that “there was room in society for the ‘gay bachelor’, for independent and transient men”, while women were pressured to “marry and bear children” (p.

² Traditional healers in South Africa (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005)

22). Lewis and Loots (1994) explain that gay men had “easier access” to the gay subculture (as described earlier), because men were “not confined to the domestic sphere”, in which virtue and good appearance were strongly encouraged in women (p. 146). Hence, lesbians very often lacked social and political support, and were restricted within the socio-cultural confines placed upon them during apartheid.

1.2.1.2. Mobilisation against apartheid laws

Although gay men and lesbians faced many social and political difficulties, and did not belong to one unified gay and lesbian subculture, many were active in the fight against apartheid legislation. In 1982 the first national gay organisation, the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA), was founded in Johannesburg (Croucher, 2002). This group, however, aimed to provide the “non-militant non-political answer to gay needs”, which remained stoically uninvolved with the surrounding political struggle, and mostly operated as a social space for “white, middle-class gay men” (Croucher, 2002, p. 318). GASA eventually came under a great deal of criticism from the international and national gay and lesbian community, as the group failed to support one of its few “black” members, Simon Nkoli, when he was put on trial for his part in the anti-apartheid struggle (Cock, 2003; Rydström, 2005).

During the 1980s two other lesbian and gay organisations were formed, which both assumed a political stance (Croucher, 2002; Hoad, 2005). The one organisation, which mainly consisted of “black” gay men and lesbians, was Gays and Lesbians of the Witwaterstrand (GLOW), with Simon Nkoli as the leader (Croucher, 2002). In the Western Cape, the Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists (OLGA), was formed by a group of “middle-class ‘white’ intellectuals” (Croucher, 2002, p. 319). Although the organisations were relatively homogenous in their membership, both groups were active in combining the anti-apartheid struggle with the campaign for gay rights (Croucher, 2002).

Both GLOW and OLGA became affiliated with the anti-apartheid movement the United Democratic Front, which signalled a “seismic shift in the history of lesbian and gay politics in South Africa” (Hoad, 2005, p. 18). Along with this affiliation, lesbian and gay activists were successful in their efforts by eventually appealing to the African Nationalist Party’s policy of liberation in 1992 (Cock, 2003; Croucher, 2002). As a result of their participation in the anti-

apartheid struggle, lesbians and gay men were rewarded with constitutional changes to their social and political status in South Africa.

Whether the socio-political situation for lesbians and gay men has changed in post-apartheid years is, however, questionable. This shall now be considered in light of the issues around homosexuality in South Africa.

1.2.2. Post-apartheid South Africa: continuing a history of violence

Today, South Africa enjoys a constitution, effected in 1996, that explicitly includes a clause against discrimination based on sexual orientation (Christiansen, 2000), which opened a space that allowed for the protection of LGB rights. This was particularly significant given that South Africa was the first country in the world to make this constitutional change (Cock, 2003; Swarr, 2009). The protection of LGB rights signifies a “good measure of liberal democracy” (Reid, 2010, p. 47) or, a “‘litmus test’ for human rights in previously colonial or democratic societies where colonial masters and missionaries had previously criminalised the longstanding practice of homosexuality” (Reddy, 2002, p. 164).

Apart from the constitutional changes that have occurred, several legal changes have been made post-apartheid which benefit the lives of lesbians and gay men. Firstly, in 1998, sodomy was abolished as a crime by the constitutional court (Reddy, 2009), which signalled a major shift from the way in which homosexuality was legally constructed during apartheid. Secondly, instances of discrimination in medical aid and pension schemes towards people in same-sex partnerships were addressed, and ruled as unconstitutional (Reddy, 2009). In 2002, thirdly, the constitutional court declared that same-sex couples could legally adopt children (Reddy, 2002). Most significantly, in 2006, South Africa became the “fourth country in the world, and the first on the African continent, to legalise marriage between people of the same sex” through the Civil Union Act (Judge, Manion & de Waal, 2008, p. 1). As Reddy (2009) suggests, such judgements “are indicative of a developing jurisprudence that allocates inalienable rights and privileges to the queer subject” (p. 345).

Reid (2010) comments, however, that there is a significant gap between the “ideals of the South African Constitution and lived reality” (p. 38). Despite the legislative changes, the struggle is not

yet over, as a patriarchal and heteronormative culture continues to permeate South African society, where gay and lesbian equality is not accepted by a large part of the population (Hoad, 2005; Reid, 2010). In fact, Hames (2007) goes as far as to say, “South African society is still deeply conservative, divisive, patriarchal, homo-prejudiced, and racist” (p. 55).

Heteronormativity can be understood as the “myriad ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted, ordinary phenomenon” (Kitzinger, 2005, p. 478). Within South Africa, Hames (2007) believes that heterosexuality has been normalised, which means that, same-sex relationships are ignored or denied both on a social and institutional level. Therefore, LGB people living in South Africa continually have to negotiate their sexuality within the confines of a heteronormative society. Going against heterosexual norms in South Africa can at times incur violence against LGB people (Graziano, 2004a).

Patriarchy is an ideology which has ensured the supremacy of (“white”) men and masculinity from as far back as the colonial period of South Africa, and has extended into post-apartheid South African society (Britton, 2006). Lewis (2003) explains that patriarchy has become naturalised in South Africa, in that “the patriarchal scripts of identity and culture are entrenched in the icons that give shape to our behavioural codes, our institutional cultures, the ostensibly natural conventions by which we live, work, and find pleasure” (p. 4). This is exemplified in a study involving boys from high schools in the Western Cape, in which they stated that a man is “the head of the household while women are subordinate to men”, and that “‘a real man’ does not behave in ways that are ‘unmanly’ and does not have sex with another man” (Ratele, 2006, p. 52). Although “new masculinities”, which differ from that of “white” Afrikaner masculinity, have emerged in post-apartheid South Africa, patriarchal relations of power continue to pervade civil society (Britton, 2006). This has the effect of marginalising women and any other people who appear to contradict rigid gender norms, which, in turn, reproduces patriarchy.

Masculinity has become entwined with a culture of violence in South Africa. What started as state violence during apartheid has taken on a variety of forms in the post-apartheid period (Britton, 2006). For instance, gender-based violence manifests in, “[r]ape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, ‘corrective rape’ against gays and lesbians, virginity testing and sexual assaults” (Britton, 2006, p. 149). Moffett (2006) notes that South Africa has been repeatedly rated as having

higher levels of violence against women than “anywhere else in the world not at war or embroiled in civil conflict” and “at least one in three South African women can expect to be raped in her lifetime” (p. 129). Surprisingly, the incident rate of rape has increased since the move to democracy, and the South African Police believe that only three per cent of rapes committed are reported (Britton, 2006). Hence, regardless of the transition to democracy, women in particular continue to face an on-going threat of physical, psychological or sexual harm on a daily basis.

Cock (2003) argues that heterosexism and violence against gay men and lesbians is pervasive in post-apartheid South Africa, and that LGB people frequently experience “shaming, harassment, discrimination and violence” (p. 41). Violence, which takes the form of “corrective rape”, presents a specific problem for lesbians and gay men living in South Africa (Britton, 2006; Hames, 2007). It is through these acts of violence that gender and sexuality have come under social control. As Rubin (1987, as cited in Artz, 2009) explains, sexuality is inscribed through “systems of power, which reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others” (p. 173). Moreover, Nkabinde and Morgan (2005) believe that lesbian rape is viewed “as necessary by thugs in order to teach visible lesbians a lesson” (p. 232). One such example of corrective rape in South Africa is that of Zoliswa Nkonyana, aged 19, who was battered and murdered by a gang of men “for the ‘crime’ of being a lesbian” (Ratele, 2006, p. 59). This type of rape is supported by both patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies which shape the belief that lesbians and gay men can be eradicated, or that their sexuality can be “fixed”, and in doing so, reinstate heterosexuality as the norm.

Evidently, despite the policies against the discrimination of LGB people, a heterosexist, violent culture continues to be fostered within South Africa. This issue of heterosexism shall be addressed further in chapter three. In the next section, I shall outline the socio-political context in which this study was conducted.

1.2.3. Transformation at a historically white university

Hames (2007) notes that South African universities are one site where policies have been changed in order to assist groups of people who were previously marginalised based on their race, gender or sexual orientation. Despite the fact that universities were required to make changes in order to ensure social and political transformation, Hames (2007) points out that these institutions have

been slow to do so, and in fact often continue to reproduce conservative ideology. While “quantitative” changes have been made, such as including more black students into historically white universities, little has been done to improve the qualitative experience of people who are not “white”, heterosexual or male (Hames, 2007, p. 57). Furthermore, Duncan (2005, as cited in Robus & Macleod, 2006) asserts that universities in South Africa “continue to be racialised... through socialisation, staffing composition and the politics of space” (p. 471). Although “race” is one issue that needs to be addressed in the transformation process, sexual orientation is another, and it is worth considering whether changes have been made to the practices and policies of institutions of higher education.

The (lesbian-identified) women who participated in this study were students at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. Rhodes is a historically white university located in the Eastern Cape, which is the province with the second highest rate of poverty in South Africa (Fenske, 2004). In the vision of Rhodes, it is stated that as a university it “proudly affirms its African identity and... is committed to democratic ideals” (Vision and Mission, 2008). It is also stated that the University endeavours to “acknowledge and be sensitive to the problems created by the legacy of apartheid, to reject all forms of unfair discrimination and to ensure that appropriate corrective measures are employed to redress past imbalances” (Vision and Mission, 2008). Rhodes University is, therefore, in a process of transformation, changing from a predominantly “white” university to one which is inclusive of all people and that is based on democratic ideals. As Badat (2008, Vice Chancellor’s Welcome) comments, the knowledge which is produced through research at Rhodes should “promote equity, justice, and economic and social development”.

Although the University appears to have made a commitment to the process of transformation, the structure of the university still perpetuates certain racial and social discrepancies. Robus and Macleod (2006) point out, for instance, that the Grahamstown campus of Rhodes University continues to be frequently spoken of as a “white” university. Moreover, through comparison with “black” universities, Rhodes is constructed by staff members and students as a space which exemplifies “white excellence” (Robus & Macleod, 2006, p. 473). Through this discourse, Robus and Macleod (2006) argue that, “black” universities are reinstated as sites for “black failure” (p. 473). Hence, regardless of the changes that have been, or are being, made to the institutional

structure, Euro-American and “white” standards continue to shape this university environment, and shall be taken into consideration when examining the experiences and narratives of the students in this study.

In 2009, when this study was conducted, there were 4105 females, compared to 2866 males, enrolled at Rhodes University. The racial profile of the student population is indicated in table 1 (Registrar’s Division, personal communication, June 12, 2009). As one can see from the table below, changes have been made with regard to the intake of non-“white” students, in order to correct the previous imbalance.

Table 1

INDIAN	AFRICAN	COLOURED	WHITE	TOTAL
300	3464	241	2966	6971

There are policies that have been implemented at Rhodes, which aim to protect the rights and safety of the students. One example is the Harassment Policy, which was put in place in 2000 and revised in 2005 (Dean of Students, 2005). This policy prohibits any “verbal or physical conduct that denigrates or shows hostility” towards students or staff members, based on their “race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, conscience, belief, culture, language, birth and health status” (Dean of Students, 2005). The Sexual Assault Protocol similarly prohibits “non-consensual physical contact of a sexual nature” (Dean of Students, 2010). Sexual assault is recognised as an act which can occur either between people of different genders or the same gender, and as a violent act which involves one person ignoring another person’s wishes or his/her inability to consent (Dean of Students, 2010). These policies thus enable students to lay claims for any experiences of discrimination that they may have had, based on their race, gender, or sexuality.

With the changes that have been made at Rhodes with respect to acknowledging all students’ rights and equality, societies such as OUTRhodes have been able to gain a space within the university. OUTRhodes is a society for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and intersexed (LGBTI) students, although any students who support LGBTI rights are welcome to join. The society began around the end of apartheid, as the Sexuality Tolerance and Education Programme

(STEP) – an organisation which was predominantly for lesbian and gay students (Tsampiras, C., former committee member of STEP, personal communication, May 16, 2010). Even after the new constitution was put into place, the university campus was still segregated to a large extent, and issues around sexuality (including heterosexism) continued to be overlooked (Tsampiras, C., 2010). During this time, the leadership of the society was male-dominated and was not particularly political. Women's and feminist issues were very often sidelined within this androcentric space, and the society was not entirely inclusive of "black", "coloured" and "Indian" students.

The aims of STEP were to raise awareness about the existence of LGBTI people on campus, to provide support and a comfortable space for them to socialise in, and to educate people about heterosexism (Tsampiras, C., 2010). Members of the society were involved in activities such as the distribution of pamphlets on heterosexism and on how the constitution protects the rights of LGBTI people, and supporting students who experienced heterosexist comments or attacks from others. The society also organised events, such as going to the annual Johannesburg Pride event, where members could meet other LGBTI people from around the country.

The name of the society has since been changed to OUTRhodes, which is now meant to include all LGBTI students, and not just gay men and lesbians. Although the society initially had a far larger male demographic, this has since changed and now there are more females than males in the organisation. The majority of the members continues to be "white". However, in the last three years the percentage of "black" members has increased dramatically (Phumedi, J., former president of OUTRhodes, personal communication, May 5, 2010).

The way in which this society is still based on "white" people's experiences of sexuality is evident in the social events which are held, such as dress up parties, in that they are constructed around a certain understanding of LGBTI experience, namely, a westernised version (Phumedi, J., 2010). While OUTRhodes has been successful in constructing certain spaces for LGBTI students, these continue not to be open to all, especially "black" students, which reflects broader social patterns in the university institution. Apart from creating a space (albeit exclusive) in which LGBTI students can socialise, OUTRhodes has additionally been an active political organisation, both on the Rhodes campus and within the wider Grahamstown community. The aim of the society is to raise

awareness about LGBTI rights, and the fight against heterosexism remains central. Thus, OUTRhodes has provided a forum in which LGBTI students can contest any forms of discrimination that they face within the university and within the wider South African society. However, given its location within a historically white university, this society is clearly still marked by the racial and social divisions that were created through South Africa's history of apartheid, and these divisions should be kept in mind when considering the experiences of lesbian students today, who come from a range of demographic backgrounds.

Rhodes University is a historically white university, which has meant that changes have needed to be made, in order to address practices which previously disadvantaged or ignored the rights of non-“white” students. The university is currently involved, therefore, in a process of transformation, where reform is continually being made, particularly in the policies which are aimed at protecting the rights of all students and their access to higher education. This move towards ensuring the equality of students at Rhodes has enabled societies such as OUTRhodes to claim a space for LGBTI students within the university environment. However, the social and political transformation of this university is far from complete, which means that inequalities based on race, gender and sexual orientation continue to occur. This issue, particularly with regard to students' sexual orientation, shall be explored extensively in this thesis.

In the following section, I shall address the way in which sexual identity has been studied from two different perspectives, and explain how this study is grounded in the social constructionist paradigm.

1.3. Approaches to understanding (homo)sexual³ identities

Literature on the development of lesbian and gay identities has predominantly been grounded in two arguments, either in the essentialist paradigm or in social constructionist thought (Diamond, 2008; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Mosher, 2001; Stein, 1996). These two perspectives shall now be outlined briefly, and then expanded upon in the following two literature chapters.

³ This term is bracketed at times in this thesis in order to contest the way in which a person's homosexuality has to be specified, while other people's heterosexuality remains the “absent trace” and is thus merely referred to as their ‘sexuality’.

The first approach to understanding sexuality can be termed an “essentialist” one. It is noteworthy that references to essentialism have largely been made in social constructionist writing and that there are “few self-identified essentialists” (Stein, 1996, p. 86). This highlights the normative status of essentialism in the study of sexuality (Stein, 1996). Essentialist studies can be identified as those that view sexual identities as static entities which are made up of universal characteristics (Stein, 1996, p. 86). As Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995) describe, homosexual identities are treated as “*essences* – core, fundamental ways of being” (p. 95, emphasis in original). Sexuality, from an essentialist perspective, is thought to be “a part of basic human nature” and based on “biological processes” (Diamond, 2008, p. 19). Thus, sexual identities are analysed for common characteristics and for certain developmental patterns, which is evident in the dominant developmental theories of sexuality, known as coming out models (Mosher, 2001).

“Coming out” is an established term in the gay and lesbian lexicon (Seidman, 2004a). The simplest definition of “coming out” is the “realisation of one’s gay or lesbian sexual orientation and the subsequent disclosure of that orientation to others” (Greene, 1994, p. 6). This developmental process can be pictured as a journey through which a person develops her⁴ sexual identity, whereby she comes to accept herself as lesbian and publicly lead her life accordingly. However, this term can also denote the disclosure of one’s sexual identity to others in a single moment (Cohen & Savin-Williams, 1996).

Chapter two shall focus on the way in which (homo)sexual identities have been studied from an essentialist perspective, with reference made to coming out models, or theories of gay and lesbian sexual identity development. In addition, as I shall explain in the next chapter, this understanding of sexuality has stemmed from the American lesbian and gay movement of the 1970s (Seidman, 2004a), and have been used extensively by coming out theorists (e.g., Cass, 1979).

Despite the fact that the essentialist perspective on sexuality has been dominant, sexuality can also be analysed from a social constructionist viewpoint. Stein (1996) defines social constructionism as “a belief both in the primary importance of social forces in shaping human behaviour and experience and that knowledge is not a reflection of the world but rather a product of discourse”

⁴ Given that this project involves the study of lesbians’ narrative constructions of identity, the pronouns “she” and “her” shall be used throughout this thesis to denote the first person.

(p. 84). There are several foundational studies that have encouraged a social constructionist approach to sexual identities. For instance, Kinsey (1948, as cited in Stein, 1996) suggested that sexuality cannot be categorised and that the “diversity and variation in human sexuality” should be acknowledged (p. 84). Foucault (1978/1990) also provided a framework for social constructionist studies and his influence is clear in the wide application of his work. Stein (1996) explains that Foucault encouraged the view that sexuality is produced through socio-cultural frameworks, rather than merely being affected by them. Thus, social constructionists have focused their attention on the ways in which sexuality is constructed in particular contexts, and have maintained a critical stance towards the idea of “fixity and naturalness of any sexual category” (Stein, 1996, p. 86). This approach to sexual identities, particularly drawing on Foucauldian thought, shall be adopted and explained throughout this thesis.

While grounding this project in a social constructionist perspective, I shall critique the perspective of coming out theorists, and how gay and lesbian identities have been presented as products of a developmental process. Furthermore, I shall question whether the concept of “coming out” is applicable and useful within the South African context. The theoretical grounding of this study shall now be addressed.

1.4. Theoretical framework: a narrative-discursive approach

This project is based on the theoretical contributions of Taylor (2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2006) and specifically Taylor and Littleton’s (2006) narrative-discursive approach, in which a discursive analysis is applied to narratives. Burman, Kottler, Levett and Parker (1997) explain that within discursive work, language is viewed as constitutive of “who we are... [and] is the medium by which we interact with other people and understand ourselves” (p. 7). This is evident in Taylor and Littleton’s (2006) approach. For example, narratives are understood from this perspective as constructed within particular discursive and social conditions. Narratives are considered, in addition, to be sites in which a person’s identity (or biographical) work takes place (Taylor, 2006). Hence, identities are envisioned as entities which are constituted through language and within specific socio-historical locations, and as always open to change (Taylor, 2006). This approach allows one to consider how a person’s identity is constructed on the micro-level of everyday interaction and during a person’s on-going biographical work.

The narrative-discursive approach to identity construction can be extended to include Foucault's (1978/1990) analytics of power. The reason for incorporating Foucauldian thought within a narrative-discursive approach is to allow speakers' (in this case, lesbians') identities to be analysed in terms of how they are both enabled and constrained within discourse and within a network of power relations. Burman et al. (1997) offer a definition of discourse that highlights the relation between discourse and power. They define discourse as "frameworks of meaning that are realised in language but produced by institutional and ideological structures and relations" (Burman et al., 1997, p. 8). Therefore, speakers are continually reinstating relations of power within their daily interactions, and this can be analysed by incorporating an analysis of both discourse and power.

Foucault's (1978/1990) analytics of power shall be utilised in this project in order to explain how power shapes knowledge and lesbian subjectivity. I shall draw on Foucault's (1978/1990) theory of "confession", which can be used to explain how lesbians have learnt to regulate and "confess" their (abnormal) sexual identities within the conditions of a heteronormative society. This Foucauldian approach therefore involves an analysis of identity construction on the macro-level, whereby identities are considered for how they are shaped by social practices and ideologies. Following Burman et al. (1997), this project involves an analysis of how "institutional power relations are both reproduced and contested within more 'low-level', everyday contexts of talk and action" (p. 8).

The theoretical orientation of this project therefore consists of two perspectives, namely, the narrative-discursive approach and Foucault's (1978/1990) analytics of power, which have been integrated, in order to consider how identity construction takes place both on a micro- and macro-political level. From this perspective, furthermore, the lesbian speaker is considered to be involved in a continual process of identity reconstruction. Therefore, within this thesis I aim to explore how lesbians negotiate and (re)construct their sexual identities within social, historical and discursive contexts in which certain relations of power circulate.

1.4.1. Analysing stories of sexual identity

Taylor and Littleton's (2006) narrative-discursive method shall be used to analyse the interviews of the eight female students who participated in this study. This method facilitates an analysis of lesbians' narratives of identity, as it enables a consideration for how identity construction occurs

within particular contextual and discursive frameworks. This method firstly involves a search for what discursive resources, such as “interpretative repertoires” or “canonical narratives”, are made available within specific narrative tellings (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 22). Interpretative repertoires are socially relevant ways of speaking about an event or phenomenon (Edley, 2001) and canonical narratives are recognisable ways of storying a life (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Secondly, a speaker’s identity work is analysed for how it is shaped and constrained by the discursive resources that are made available in the narrative (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). This method is not, however, made up of two discrete steps. Rather, it involves an iterative process of moving back and forth between the analytic tasks (Taylor & Littleton, 2006).

The participants’ stories shall, furthermore, be read through a Foucauldian lens, in order to analyse how lesbians negotiate their sexual identities, while located within particular networks of power. Therefore, a lesbian’s sexual identity shall not be considered in isolation, but shall be, rather, analysed for how it intersects with her other identities (such as race, class or religion). In addition, this shall involve an analysis of how certain social practices shape lesbians’ construction of their sexual identities, and the ways in which lesbians negotiate their sexual identities amidst (and against) prevailing norms. In this study, I aim to provide a nuanced account of how lesbians construct their sexual identities within the context of a historically white university in post-apartheid South Africa. In doing so, I question whether theories of coming out, and the narrative of “coming out”, fully capture the on-going and varied process of identity management that these lesbians engage in while living in this particular society.

1.5. Overall structure

In the second chapter, the study of homosexuality shall be critically discussed from an essentialist perspective. Particular reference shall be made to coming out models and the way in which lesbian and gay sexual identities are constructed as products of a developmental process. Chapter three shall apply a social constructionist lens in order to enable an understanding of how a person’s (homo)sexuality and the disclosure of her sexuality are shaped by socio-cultural conditions. I shall then explain the theoretical perspective taken in this study in the fourth chapter, namely, Taylor and Littleton’s (2006) narrative-discursive approach and the way in which identity and narratives are conceptualised within this approach. This shall include a discussion of Foucault’s (1978/1990) analytics of power, which can be utilised to extend the narrative-discursive approach in order to

incorporate a focus on power in the analysis of identity construction. The methodology of this study, which is based on the combined approach of the narrative-discursive method and Foucauldian thought, shall then be discussed in chapter five. In chapters six and seven, the results shall be presented and explained in detail, paying specific attention to the ways in which lesbians contest and reproduce prevailing ideologies or norms, and how they negotiate their sexual identities within particular social and discursive conditions. The conclusion of the study shall be presented in chapter eight, and recommendations for further research shall be suggested.

CHAPTER TWO

COMING OUT: THE ACQUISITION OF A (HOMO)SEXUAL IDENTITY

Theories of homosexual identity development have proliferated since the 1970s, and have since influenced understandings of what it means to take on a lesbian or gay identity, or, to “come out”. Owing to its circulation in academic, political, and lay contexts, the concept of “coming out” has become fundamentally entwined with the lives of gay men and lesbians⁵. With this focus on identity development, lesbians’ and gay men’s experiences have been studied frequently for the ways in which they follow certain paths which lead to the acquisition and integration of a sexual identity. As developmental theories, coming out models have successfully enabled a positive reformulation of homosexuality by shifting the focus away from its supposed abnormality and emphasising the benefits of coming out instead (Gonsiorek, 1996). Yet, as with most dominant theories, coming out models have often been adopted uncritically, and this has led to the perpetuation of certain assumptions about homosexual identities and their development.

The central aim of this chapter is to explain the development of lesbian identities from the perspective of coming out theorists. First of all, I shall highlight the socio-historical context in which coming out models developed. This was at a time when a discourse of “coming out” emerged in academic and lay understandings of homosexuality. This discussion shall include a consideration of the coming out story, as this narrative both mirrors and reproduces what is understood as the coming out process. This leads to a critical discussion of the models of Cass (1979), and Troiden (1988). Both Cass (1979) and Troiden (1988) have been (and continue to be) cited extensively in the field of lesbian and gay identity development, and therefore best exemplify the coming out perspective. Hence, it is useful to consider these particular models in order to understand how sexual identity is theorised from this perspective. I shall then address some of the common assumptions that are made from this approach to sexual identity and its development. Furthermore, I shall consider the value and application of coming out models, particularly within the context of South Africa.

⁵ This study is about the development of a homosexual identity, so the experiences of gay men and lesbians (and to a lesser extent, bisexuals) shall be addressed, as opposed to those of transgendered or intersexed people.

2.1. The discourse of “coming out”

“Coming out of the closet” has become a central metaphor for depicting the journey that a lesbian or a gay man takes in emerging from a “state of self-alienation and inauthenticity” (Seidman, 2004a, p. 256) to a place of self-acceptance and living an openly-gay life. The closet metaphor is effective in that it highlights the heterosexism that lesbians and gay men have to overcome while trying to claim a non-normative sexual identity. Furthermore, it signals positive changes in an individual’s sense of self, by depicting a move from sexual shame to pride – a process which Cass (1979) explains in her model of coming out. The discourse of coming out can take the form of a narrative, the coming out story, which offers gay men and lesbians the means to story their lives in ways that are not according to the heterosexual life trajectory (Bacon, 1998; Blackburn, 2009). This narrative has shaped theoretical understandings of sexual identity; yet, coming out models have, in turn, enabled the continued articulation and validation of the coming out story. Therefore, prevailing ways of understanding and speaking about (homo)sexual identities are contingent upon each other.

2.1.1. Historical context of the “coming out” discourse

On the 27th June 1969 police raided a gay and drag bar at the Stonewall Inn in New York (Jagose, 1996). The attack was met with resistance, which led to a weekend of demonstrations from the gay and lesbian community (Jagose, 1996). This retaliation marks a watershed in gay and lesbian history, which up to this point, consisted of gay men’s and lesbians’ attempts to assimilate into mainstream society as acceptable citizens (Gamson, 2003; Jagose, 1996). Jagose (1996) points out that although this incident did not trigger the gay and lesbian movement per se, it indicated the first time that people rallied together politically, based on their sexuality. Although gay men and lesbians have been sidelined in American (and other) society, they have stood up since against discriminatory policies and practices by forming a minority group identity, similar to other ethnic-based groups (Gamson, 2003). Political strategies of the American gay liberation movement began to include encouraging lesbians and gay men to “come out”, or make themselves visible in a heterosexist society. Since then, the concept of “coming out of the closet” has been central to the political mobilisation of the gay movement (Jagose, 1996; Seidman, 2004a).

The emergence of the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) political movement of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in the USA, played not only a major role in the everyday lives of LGB people,

but also in the study of sexuality (Gamson, 2003). Studies on sexuality multiplied during this time, especially in the USA and the United Kingdom (UK), when researchers in the social sciences became interested in disproving previous notions about the abnormality of homosexuality. Instead, studies began to emphasise the “normality and respectability of non-normative sexualities” (Gamson, 2003, p. 544). By presenting homosexuality as a “stable identity”, Eliason (1996) points out that the LGB movement could “make substantial gains in social recognition and increased civil rights” (p. 33).

2.1.2. The coming out story: counternarrative to heteronormativity

Cohler and Hammack (2006) explain that sexual storytelling is “always historically situated and dependent on the cumulative social and political activity that transforms societal attitudes about homosexuality” (p. 154). The discursive act of narrating one’s “coming out” experience, for example, has been shaped by the LGB movement in the USA, which encouraged the acquisition and celebration of gay and lesbian identities (Hammack & Cohler, 2009). Since then, telling one’s “coming out” story has become an integral feature in the lives of lesbians and gay men, given that it has worked as a counternarrative to heteronormativity.

The coming out story has a number of recognisable features or events, which shall now be described using Plummer’s (1995) analysis of this narrative. In the coming out story, childhood is narrated as a time fraught with difficulty, when the child experiences feelings of difference (Plummer, 1995). Plummer (1995) labels this narrative a “deterministic tale”, in that being lesbian or gay is retrospectively narrated as the source of isolation (p. 83). A turning point occurs, generally in adolescence, when problems start to arise. A multitude of problems could occur, including, “secrecy, guilt/shame, fear of discovery, suicidal feeling”, depression and so forth; these cause the individual to “discover” that s/he is lesbian or gay (Plummer, 1995, p. 83). These problems are often partially alleviated by meeting other gay people, with whom the person feels a sense of solidarity (Plummer, 1995). Plummer (1995) explains that the individual finally gains an integrated sense of self. This process shall be expanded upon in the later discussion of coming out models.

This story can be understood as a “narrative of struggle and success”, based on the historical struggle of the LGB liberation movement in the USA (Hammack & Cohler, 2009, p.4). Emulating

this movement, this story is one marked by the difficulty and stress related to living in a heterosexist society, but one which concludes with the “resilient triumph of self-actualisation” (Hammack & Cohler, 2009, p. 4), or, what Roof (1996, as cited in Bacon, 1998) describes as the “victorious product of a struggle with self” (p. 255). When considering the pride that is spoken of, it is crucial to read that emotion within the context of a political movement which aimed at overcoming the oppression and stigma attached to homosexuality, and which encouraged identification and community-building around a shared sexual identity (Shepard, 2009).

Cohler and Hammack (2006) argue that “possessing and embracing an identity of contested social status, gay men and lesbians have developed a particular narrative of development, counter to that of the master heteronormative narrative” (p. 152). The coming out story is significant for people who have been socialised as heterosexual, but later take on a homosexual identity (Plummer, 1995), as it provides them with a different way to story and create meaning in their lives. In addition, Bacon (1998) believes that the disclosure of one’s sexual identity or telling of one’s coming out story is necessary for lesbians and gay men to contest or avoid being automatically assumed heterosexual. Bacon (1998) states that “one way for gay and lesbian identities to exist at all in heterosexist cultures is for us to ‘hail’ ourselves into being by differentiating ourselves from something else” (p. 251).

Blackburn (2009) explains that counternarratives “constitute and restore identities that are not always valued in society” (p. 133). Gay and lesbian identities continue to be denigrated within heterosexist society but, given the positive nature of the coming out story, these can be rearticulated in more affirmative ways. Blackburn (2009) further explains that “counternarratives, by documenting the ‘feelings, beliefs, events, and practices of people who have been marginalised’ (Chapman, 2006, as cited in Blackburn, 2009) play a significant role in ‘counteract[ing] or challeng[ing] the dominant story’” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, as cited in Blackburn, 2009, p. 133). Thus, the coming out story provides “a new set of symbolic meanings, rituals and social interactions distinct from a heterosexist normative culture”, with which lesbians and gay men can narrate their lives and identities (Cohler & Hammack, 2007, p. 52).

The coming out story can be viewed as an empowering counternarrative, since it provides a story that is distinct from the heterosexist life trajectory, and which enables lesbians and gay men to

assert their existence while continuing to live in a heterosexist context (Cohler & Hammack, 2009). It has provided a familiar story, involving recognisable events and shared experiences, and has enabled community-building in the LGB subculture. Moreover, it has enabled lesbians and gay men to oppose negative constructions of homosexuality, by supplying them with the means to positively narrate an identity, even as it differs from the norm, and thus adopt a position of power.

2.2. Coming out models

As I shall show in the following section, coming out models present various milestones or recognisable events in the development of a lesbian or gay identity. Coming out models, such as that of Cass (1979), have further augmented the knowledge of lesbian and gay identities and have constructed the developmental process of gay men and lesbians as valid and worthy of study. Nevertheless, developmental theories of sexuality have the potential to limit what is considered legitimate experience. Moreover, understandings of lesbian and gay sexual identities, which are based on coming out models, may no longer apply to people who experience same-sex attractions (Diamond, 2008). It is useful, therefore, to remember the historical and political era in which coming out models developed – namely, a time when a fixed, overt sexual identity was a necessary source of solidarity and pride – and to recognise that knowledge about same-sex sexuality is going to change according to time and place.

Each model explains identity formation differently, but they commonly present coming out as a fairly straightforward set of stages through which someone comes to terms with her sexuality (Cohen & Savin-Williams, 1996). Thus, from this approach, a lesbian's identity is viewed as a core part of herself that becomes increasingly integrated into her sense of self as she reveals it both publicly and privately. This is exemplified in Cass' (1979) coming out model.

2.2.1. Cass (1979)

Cass (1979) presents a six-stage model which represents the process that people undergo in order to identify as gay men or lesbians. Individuals are expected to move through the stages of: (1) *identity confusion*, (2) *identity comparison*, (3) *identity tolerance*, (4) *identity acceptance*, (5) *identity pride*, and (6) *identity synthesis*. Cass' (1979) model is gender neutral in that she does not differentiate between the experiences of men and women, as she expects them to move through the

same stages of development. After an initial discussion of Cass' (1979) theoretical perspective, the six stages of the model shall be elaborated upon.

Cass (1979) argues that people are able to actively participate in this developmental process, where they can follow different paths, depending on how positively or negatively they view homosexuality. This model is based on the supposition that a secure sense of self is reached through a cognitive process of development. Therefore, any behavioural change necessary for this growth is dependent upon the individual's perception of his/her behaviour and identity in relation to the perceived reactions of others (Cass, 1979).

This model is informed by interpersonal congruency theory which posits that a person's behaviour is either altered or strengthened by how well facets of his/her interpersonal environment fit together (Cass, 1979). Hence, the more a person senses incongruence in his/her life, the more likely s/he is to change his/her thoughts, feelings or behaviour, in order to gain consistency between his/her own and others' perceptions of him/herself (Cass, 1979). Cass explains that a person's sense of stability or incongruence (source of change) is based on an "intrapersonal matrix" (p. 221). There are three components which make up this internal matrix. These are a person's perception of some part of his/her self, namely, his/her sexuality, the perception s/he has of his/her subsequent behaviour, and his/her perception of other people's views about his/her sexuality (Cass, 1979).

When a person experiences discordance within his/her intrapersonal matrix, s/he will be compelled to restore congruency (Cass, 1979). This would lead the person to "come out" further, by affirming his/her sexual identity, otherwise "identity foreclosure" would take place (Cass, 1979, p. 223). Identity foreclosure can be understood as a defence mechanism, whereby the individual will try numerous means to deny his/her (homo)sexuality. Cass posits that, if identity foreclosure does not occur, a person will gradually modify his/her intrapersonal matrix through the coming out process.

Cass (1979) acknowledges that people can take their own paths, which are patterned by their decisions either to ignore their sexuality, or to continue exploring their sexual feelings. The ideal outcome is that a person's intrapersonal matrix will change from one which is congruent with the

notion of him/herself as heterosexual to one which fits a sense of self as homosexual (Cass, 1979). Cass recognises the difficulty of achieving an entirely congruent intrapersonal matrix, but she suggests that a person can make changes so that any incompatibility is “both tolerable and manageable” (p. 222). This leads us to a discussion of the six stages of development.

In the first stage - *identity confusion* - a person becomes aware that information regarding homosexuality may pertain to him/her. Some people might find this more significant than others, and, for some, this association cannot be overlooked. The person will endure conflict and uncertainty as s/he begins to question his/her sexuality (Cass, 1979). Some might not view homosexuality in a positive light and will try to re-establish their heterosexuality by socialising with someone of another sex. After identity foreclosure, the person would not explore a homosexual identity further, which would restore his/her sense of inner congruency. If a person does view homosexuality positively, s/he may question whether s/he is in fact lesbian or gay and would seek more information.

Within the stage of *identity comparison*, Cass (1979) believes that a person will acknowledge the potentiality that s/he “may be homosexual” (p. 225). By this time the individual would suffer less confusion, as the difference between his/her sense of self and his/her behaviour would not be so marked. However, this state would prompt a greater concern about social isolation, where the person would feel “a sense of ‘not belonging’” both within his/her personal social circle and within a wider social context, which can cause “intense anguish” (p. 225).

A person could still “pass” as heterosexual (Cass, 1979, p. 226) during this time. Cass argues that a person can use strategies to appear heterosexual, in order to minimise his/her (homo)sexual identity. For example, s/he may purport to be mainly heterosexual if s/he only engages in homosexual behaviour with one person (Cass, 1979). Other strategies include a person identifying as bisexual, or asserting that s/he might still have heterosexual partners in the future. Cass suggests that if a person decides that homosexual identification is too threatening, then s/he may choose not to act on his/her feelings, or even take on an “asexual self-image” (p. 228). If s/he convinces him/herself that, then identity foreclosure would occur. Conversely, a person might choose to diminish the import of others’ opinions, to lessen the incongruence between his/her

behaviour, sense of self, and the perception of others' views (Cass, 1979). This would allow a person to feel more comfortable about his/her possible homosexual identity.

Identity tolerance would take place once a person began to think, "I probably am homosexual", which, Cass (1979) explains, would allow him/her the chance to identify his/her "social, emotional, and sexual needs" (p. 229). This would produce a greater degree of separation from heterosexual society; hence, a person may try to find an LGB community. Contact with LGB people will encourage a person to adopt a more positive identity, and lead him/her to interact with only a few heterosexual people. Cass (1979) believes that if a person's experience with the LGB subculture is negative, this could lead him/her to dissociate him/herself from the community and a homosexual identity, which would trigger identity foreclosure. If a person reaches a point where s/he can disclose his/her identity to other gay people and participate more within this subculture, then s/he will be able to say, "I am a homosexual" (p. 231).

By the point of *identity acceptance*, a person would accept his/her identity, and have more contact with other lesbians or gay men (Cass, 1979). S/he would also consider homosexuality more positively, and prefer "homosexual social contexts" (Cass, 1979, p. 231). However, according to Cass (1979), a person could feel comfortable with him/herself, but still be fearful of what others may think. Some people may continue to pass as heterosexual, or have restricted contact with heterosexual people who threaten their sexuality. This would prevent a person from experiencing further feelings of incongruence. If this is successful, then his/her intrapersonal matrix will remain unchallenged, which will prevent any further identity growth (Cass, 1979). On the other hand, a person may decide to disclose to people s/he trusts; yet, s/he will still be aware of the incongruence between his/her own acceptance and society's negative view towards any non-heterosexual identities (Cass, 1979). It is this incongruence which propels a person into the next stage of development.

The fifth stage, *identity pride*, marks a time when a person starts to place less value on heterosexual people's views of his/her identity, and grants more worth to people in the LGB community (Cass, 1979). A person will experience a strong sense of self and will commit to the LGB subculture. Cass (1979) posits that a person splits the world into "homosexuals (creditable and significant) and heterosexuals (discredited and insignificant)" (p. 233). A person will reject

heterosexual ideals about lifestyles and relationships, as s/he has reached a point of not only accepting, but preferring his/her gay or lesbian identity (Cass, 1979). Often the anger that is felt over having to conform to heteronormativity will encourage a person to become politically active. This behaviour will also help to reduce the sense of incongruence that is still experienced in his/her life (Cass, 1979).

As the person feels less concern for heterosexual norms and views, s/he will choose to disclose his/her identity more often. Self-disclosure particularly facilitates the alignment of a person's private identity with his/her public self (Cass, 1979). However, Cass points out that if disclosure is too uncomfortable, then a person may choose not to disclose. Naturally there will be varied responses to a person's disclosure, and Cass asserts that development will rest on how a person handles the reactions. If s/he feels that his/her expectations of other people's intolerance are confirmed by someone's negative reaction, then s/he will not be encouraged to grow (Cass, 1979). When others' positive responses differ from a person's expectations, then s/he will be motivated to continue identity development in order to deal with the incongruence between his/her expectations and actual experience.

A person will enter the final stage, *identity synthesis*, when s/he realises that his/her “‘them and us’ philosophy” does not always apply to his/her life (Cass, 1979, p. 234). When s/he discovers that not all heterosexual people are against homosexuality, there will be more coherence within a person's intrapersonal matrix. Cass states that this allows a person to recognise similarities and dissimilarities with both heterosexual and gay and lesbian people and enjoy a more “synthesised” personal and public self (p. 234). Cass posits that (homo)sexual identity development is complete when a person becomes aware that his/her sexuality is not the only part of his/her identity.

Given the fact that Cass' (1979) model continues to be used in research today (e.g., Graziano, 2004b; Halpin & Allen, 2004; Johns & Probst, 2004; Whitman, Cormier & Boyd, 2000), her theory clearly holds a degree of explanatory power. Nevertheless, there are a several points of criticism which need to be raised. These shall be discussed in detail in a later section, with regard to a general critique of essentialist notions of sexual identity and the coming out process. At this point, it is important to consider another coming out model, so as to highlight some of the similarities and differences in empirical and theoretical perspectives on coming out.

2.2.2. Troiden (1988)

Having reviewed previous coming out models, Troiden (1988) developed what he termed an “ideal-typical model” in which stages are not linear (p. 41); rather they “spiral”, meaning men and women can move back and forth between stages as they develop a sexual identity (p. 42). Troiden (1988) explains that ideal types are benchmarks of identity formation, but that people do not fit these norms exactly.

Troiden’s (1988) model is grounded in symbolic interactionism. Blumer (1969), a key theorist in this field, explains that there are three central principles. The first is that people “act toward things on the basis of their meanings that the things have for them” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). Thus, Troiden (1988) analyses the sexual meanings that people attach to homosexuality. The second point is that the meaning attached to something “is derived from, or arises out of, social interaction that one has with one’s fellows” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). Hence, Troiden (1988) considers “the social contexts and patterns of interaction” that influence people’s views about, and reactions to, homosexuality (p. 42). Thirdly, people engage in a process of interpretation, where meanings associated with certain phenomena are absorbed and reformulated (Blumer, 1969). Thus, coming out is understood as an interactive process which involves a person reconstructing his/her idea of homosexuality, from an external social category to a personally relevant label (Troiden, 1988). Troiden asserts that identity, therefore, is “always ‘emergent’ - never fully determined in any fixed or absolute sense” (p. 58).

The first stage of Troiden’s (1988) model is termed *sensitisation*, which starts before adolescence (p. 42). At this stage the person thinks of him/herself as heterosexual, but would have experienced feelings of difference in social situations. Troiden posits that a person’s behaviour may be gender atypical, which could cause him/her to feel different from others. Yet, it is only later in life that any significance is attached to these experiences (Troiden, 1988). Troiden argues that people who appear to be gender atypical will recognise their sexuality earlier than those who engage in normative behaviours.

Troiden’s (1988) second stage is *identity confusion*, when a person undergoes adolescence, and starts to consider the personal relevance of homosexuality (p. 45). Cass (1979) and Troiden (1988) appear to agree that instability and confusion are common experiences, which may be

owing to the general view that adolescence is turbulent, regardless of one's sexual orientation. Troiden (1988) also provides age estimates, and expects women to develop later than men. It is only after this first awareness has occurred that two to four years later a person might have his/her first same-sex sexual experience (Troiden, 1988). Similar to Cass (1979), Troiden notes that the individual could have a negative experience, which may lead him/her to engage in harmful behaviours or try to pass as heterosexual. If the person does accept his/her sexuality, then s/he can continue to the next stage of development.

The third stage of Troiden's (1988) model is known as *identity assumption*, which takes place "during or after late adolescence" (p. 50). Troiden believes this stage is central to coming out, as it involves the person adopting a lesbian or gay identity and disclosing it to others. Lesbians are assumed to attach significance to their identity in the "contexts of meaningful emotional involvements", while gay men do so in sexual situations (p. 50). The general age of adopting this identity is later for lesbians than for gay men. This difference between the experiences of gay men and lesbians is significant, in that Cass (1979) assumes people's experiences are the same, regardless of gender. Factors, such as negative social perceptions of homosexuality, and the information that is available to them, will also affect how people "come out" (Troiden, 1988). Hence, while some may join the LGB community, others will continue to hide their sexual identity.

The final stage of *commitment* requires a person to live a homosexual lifestyle (Troiden, 1988). According to Troiden (1988), this stage is marked by internal and external factors that indicate a person's sense of security. Internally, this equates to an identity which fuses "sexuality and emotionality into a significant whole" (p. 54). A person's commitment would be shown externally by "a same-sex relationship" (p. 55), as this indicates that s/he is actively living a homosexual lifestyle. Another indicator is when a person discloses his/her sexuality to others, including heterosexual people (Troiden, 1988). Drawing on de Monteflores and Schultz (1978, as cited in Troiden, 1988), Troiden notes that people do not disclose their sexual identity to everybody; instead, they "fluctuate back and forth in degrees of openness, depending on personal, social, and professional factors" (p. 55).

Troiden (1988) suggests that people might still behave in different ways even after entering the stage of commitment. Some might try to “cover” their homosexuality or downplay their identity in an attempt to avoid social criticism (p. 56). Others will “blend” by following heteronormative gender roles or behaviours, or they will associate themselves with the gay subculture, but view their sexuality as irrelevant (p. 57). This differs from covering, in that the person is not entirely secretive about his/her sexual identity, but neither will s/he openly speak about it to heterosexuals (Troiden, 1988). On the other hand, some people might “convert” by developing feelings of pride about their sexuality, and will involve themselves in political campaigns aimed at relieving the oppression of LGB people (p. 57).

Troiden’s (1988) model appears to be congruent with Cass’ (1979) model, even if this was not his original intention. Troiden tries to avoid developing a fixed model, yet his use of average ages and overarching statements still creates a sense of a crystallised identity. This model assumes that sexual identity forms during adolescence, but does not account for people who adopt a (homo)sexual identity far later in life (e.g., Johnston & Jenkins, 2004; Rust, 1993). Troiden further posits that development takes place later for lesbians than for gay men, which creates the assumption that women’s identity development is in some way retarded. Although Troiden suggests that people develop in a spiral direction, moving back and forth between stages, he does not clearly explain how or why they do so. Cass’ (1979) and Troiden’s (1988) models shall be assessed in the next section.

2.3. Views of (homo)sexual identity from a developmental perspective

Although they conceptualise sexual identity in slightly different ways, coming out theorists, such as Cass (1979) and Troiden (1988), appear to understand (homo)sexual identities similarly. These commonalities in understanding shall be highlighted in the following section. In this section I shall critically discuss how sexual identity is theorised from the developmental perspective of coming out theorists, as well as more recent studies, which have been based on coming out models. In addition, I shall address the fact that coming out theorists tend to ignore the nuances of identity formation, such as how one’s sexuality interacts with one’s other identities and the context in which one lives.

2.3.1. “Coming out” as a universal pattern

Throughout the above review of the coming out models, it is clear that a strong emphasis is placed on the universal nature of the coming out process and how people develop sexual identities in similar ways, regardless of gender, race, or other defining features. For instance, Cass (1979) posits that “*all* individuals move through [six stages of development] in order to acquire an identity of ‘homosexual’” (p. 220, emphasis added). In the later re-working of her model, Cass (1996) still claims that “the psychological process of confronting personal information that relates to membership in a stigmatised social category is considered a generic one” (p. 233). Despite the fact that Cass (1996) recognises in her re-working that the coming out process is a western model, she argues that people from the same culture undergo the same process of developing a (homo)sexual identity. For this reason, Cass’ (1979, 1996) model continues to present coming out, or developing a sexual identity, as a universal pattern.

2.3.1.1. Gender

Cass’ (1979) model is applied to both men’s and women’s sexual identity development and she does not point to any differences in experience. In addition, studies, such as those implemented by Floyd and Stein (2002) and Johns and Probst (2004), which have drawn on Cass’ (1979) model, have included samples of men and women, and conclusions have been made about the similarities for lesbians and gay men in terms of coming out. Johns and Probst (2004), for example, tested the last four stages of Cass’ (1979) model on a sample of 143 participants in the USA and conclude that lesbians and gay men “evolve from an unintegrated identity state to a fully integrated self-identity” (p. 89). Similarly, Floyd and Stein (2002) suggest that there are key events that take place in the lives of LGB people (regardless of gender), and that there is empirical evidence for a normative sequence of these events. This means that the qualitative differences between lesbians’ and gay men’s social and sexual experiences are not considered.

Troiden (1988), unlike Cass (1979), does address differences that can occur in lesbians’ and gay men’s development. For instance, he suggests that lesbians develop later than men, and that lesbians attach emotional significance to their experiences, whereas gay men attach sexual significance (Troiden, 1988). However, as discussed earlier, this implies that lesbians are somewhat hindered in terms of their development compared to gay men. Furthermore, although Troiden (1988) argues that he takes a contextual view of development, by grounding his work in

symbolic interactionism, he does not explain, or question, why lesbians might develop differently or how their context interacts with identity development. Consideration should be given to processes of socialisation and the ways in which women have been taught, and expected, to be more emotional than men.

2.3.1.2. Social milieu: race, culture, politics

Sophie (1985) points out that the socio-historical context of coming out models should be taken into account and questioned in terms of their particular application across time and place. For example, Sophie (1985) explains that there are several events that coming out models propose take place during *identity synthesis* or *identity integration*, which reflect the socio-political context in which they were developed. For instance, according to coming out theories, people in the final stages of coming out should commonly separate the world using the gay/straight dichotomy, experience feelings of “anger and pride with regard to their sexual identities, divulge their sexuality to many more people, and develop an identity that they are ‘unwilling to change’” (Sophie, 1985, p. 48). Sophie (1985) explains this reported behaviour as a result of the LGB liberation movement in the USA, in which LGB people would “dichotomise” the world, and be expected to exhibit emotions that would fuel political association (p. 48). She believes that the reported emotions of anger and pride in coming out studies stem specifically from participation in this liberation movement, which occurred at the time that the stage models developed. This movement clearly played a vital role in shaping the way in which sexual identity development has been understood by gay and lesbian developmental theorists. Furthermore, it makes sense that people involved in these studies were heavily influenced by their socio-political milieu, namely, the birth of gay liberation in the early 1970s.

The social milieu of individuals is not overtly addressed in coming out models (Abes & Jones, 2004). For instance, neither Cass (1979), nor Troiden (1988) mention the intersection between a person’s sexuality and race in their models of identity formation. As McCarn and Fassinger (1996) point out, coming out models have been “conceptualised around the experiences of white men” and women (p. 509). Cass (1979) does provide a caveat that her model is not necessarily true “in *all* respects for *all* people” (p. 235, emphasis in original). Notably, in a later re-articulation of her theory, Cass (1996) claims that her model (and the concept of “coming out”) is informed by western culture, and should not be applied uncritically to non-western contexts.

However, the focus of Cass' (1979, 1996) model is on the individual, rather than the social context in which a person is located. This means that regardless of whether Cass' (1979, 1996) model is applied to western or non-western contexts, the multiplicity of identity and experience still risks being overlooked.

Acquiring a lesbian identity has implications for a person's racial identity and, in turn, her racial identity can affect how she comes to identify as lesbian (Abes & Jones, 2004; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). For instance, people of colour do not only face heterosexism, but also experience the effects of "white hegemony" and subsequent marginalisation (Clarke, 2005, p. 45). Similarly, Harper, Jernewall and Zea (2004) argue that LGB people of colour can experience "racial prejudice, limited economic resources, and limited acceptance within their own cultural community" (p. 187). Hence, claiming a (homo)sexual identity requires them to consider how they will live within a society where "whiteness" and heterosexuality are both privileged.

African American communities have been stereotyped as more heterosexist than "white" communities (Blackburn, 2009), which can have homogenising effects on the experiences of "black" lesbians and gay men. Although it is vital to remain critical of essentialising particular population groups, it is still necessary to take into account the ways in which lesbians and gay men experience their sexuality differently, based on the socio-economic, racial, and historical contexts in which they live. It is questionable whether coming out models can possibly account for these differences.

Within the South African context, racial and social divisions continue. For example, even in post-apartheid South Africa, "black" gay men and lesbians are not made to feel welcome in "white" social spaces, and even face being forcibly removed from "white" gay and lesbian clubs (Graziano, 2004a; Hames, 2007). While "white" gay men and lesbians are privileged by their racial status, many "black" lesbians and gay men in South Africa continue to experience social problems such as over-crowding, poverty, and a lower socio-economic status (Graziano, 2004a; Swarr & Nagar, 2003). In addition, sexual and physical violence is a major problem for "black" gay men and especially "black" lesbians who face "corrective rape", or being raped in order to be cured of their homosexuality (Hames, 2007, p. 63). The ways in which heterosexism is experienced by LGB people in South Africa shall be discussed further in chapter three.

Taking the above examples into consideration, it seems unlikely that coming out models can account for the complexity and diversity of experience in terms of developing a lesbian or gay identity in South Africa. For instance, coming out models construct the LGB community as supportive (see Cass' (1979) stage of *identity tolerance*), but many gay men and lesbians do not experience this in the South African context. Although Cass (1979) acknowledges that not all lesbians and gay men have positive experiences with the LGB subculture, she asserts that negative experiences will lead to "foreclosure", or stagnation of a person's identity. However, in Hames' (2007) study, she shows that although students at a historically black university in South Africa did not feel welcome in the predominantly "white" LGB community in a nearby city, this did not stop them from identifying as lesbian or gay.

Given that coming out models are aimed at explaining an individual's sexual identity development, factors such as a person's socio-economic status, or her geographical location are not taken into account. However, as I shall argue in the next chapter, it is important to take relations of power into consideration when trying to understand how lesbians develop or construct sexual identities, because these shape a lesbian's identity construction and her decisions around identity disclosure.

2.3.2. Importance of self-disclosure

The disclosure of one's sexuality to another person has been presented by coming out theorists as significant in the process of coming out (see Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Sophie, 1985; Troiden, 1988). The reason for this is that disclosure signals both an internal and external recognition and acceptance of one's sexual identity. For instance, Cass (1979) suggests that a person would choose to tell someone if she wished to diminish the disparity between how she sees herself and how she perceives the way in which others see her. Drawing on humanistic theory, as proposed by Maslow (1954, as cited in Jordan & Deluty, 1998), Jordan and Deluty (1998) explain that a high level of disclosure is necessary for a person to acquire a positive sense of self. Lee (1977, as cited in Jordan & Deluty, 1998) believes that gay men and lesbians who try to pass as heterosexual to avoid disclosure experience either "the feeling of being a hypocrite, living in pretence [or] the inability to 'be oneself'" (p. 43).

Floyd and Stein (2002) note that “failing to disclose” or “hiding, may have costs in terms of feelings of alienation and low self-esteem” (p. 171). While passing, a person might separate from the surrounding LGB community and the support that it provides (Jordan & Deluty, 1998). As Dempsey (1994) points out, young gay men and lesbians’ attempts to conceal their sexuality can be both “emotionally and socially crippling”, causing lower levels of self confidence and greater chance of social isolation (p. 162). Conversely, Jordan and Deluty (1998) suggest that the more a lesbian discloses, the more chance she will have of enjoying “less anxiety, greater positive affectivity, and greater self-esteem” (p. 55).

The decision to disclose is constructed by coming out theorists, particularly Cass (1979), as an inevitable part of the acquisition of one’s homosexual identity. For example, Cass (1979) views the decision not to disclose, or to “pass”, as an obstacle in fully developing a sexual identity. However, decisions around disclosure should be considered in light of the contexts in which they are made (Harry, 1993). As Harry (1993) explains, disclosing one’s sexual identity is only one part of being gay or lesbian, rather than the inevitable outcome of a developmental process.

Although Minton and McDonald (1984) take a fairly fixed perspective on identity formation, they view self-disclosure as a more flexible process than does Cass (1979). For example, they use the term “identity management” to describe the lifelong process through which a person considers whether to disclose or not (Minton & McDonald, 1984, p. 102). Hence, people vary in the degree to which they disclose their sexuality, depending on the social situation in which they find themselves. Notably, Minton and McDonald appear to be the only coming out theorists that acknowledge that disclosure can lead to problems such as physical and verbal abuse.

By considering Minton and McDonald’s (1984) perspective, it seems unhelpful and even impossible to view disclosure as an indicator of development, or to view a person’s identity as partial, for choosing not to “come out” in a certain situation. This is especially important to remember, given that “passing as heterosexual, or not claiming a homosexual identity, may actually be a self-preservation technique in a society which is often violent and hostile with homophobia” (Mosher, 2001, p. 167). As discussed earlier, within South Africa, a lesbian’s public disclosure of her sexual identity in certain geographical and social locations could, for instance,

bring the threat of corrective rape. Therefore, coming out models which promote disclosure cannot simply be applied to understanding how lesbians negotiate their sexual identities while living in South Africa.

2.3.3. Acquisition of an authentic, unchanging sexual identity

Coming out models typically present a number of stages, which the individual is expected to undergo in order to develop his/her true sexual identity, and assert that s/he will reach a point where this identity remains fixed. Cass (1979), for example, believes that the developmental process is complete once a person can “integrate [his or her]... homosexual identity with all other aspects of self” (p. 235). Hence, Cass (1979) presents coming out as a process of crystallisation, where a person’s identity is gradually solidified over time. This model values the acquisition of a unified sense of self, and constructs a person’s sexual identity as a truth that needs to be revealed.

The assumption is often made in research on gay men and lesbians that even though people may shift their sexual identity from heterosexual to homosexual, this is a unidirectional process of self-identification. As Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995) explain, coming out studies reproduce the notion that “coming out” is “a process of learning to recognise and accept what one was all along: Indeed, the very expression *coming out* suggests that the lesbian has always been inside, awaiting debut” (p. 95, emphasis in original). Theories of coming out therefore construct homosexual identities as the true underlying identities that have been obscured by heteronormative socialisation.

Stage models, Kitzinger (1987) argues, exemplify liberal humanist psychology, through the emphasis that is placed on self-actualisation. Johns and Probst (2004), for instance, highlight this humanist assumption, that “one goal of any individual is to become a self-accepting, fully integrated human being” (p. 82). Similarly, Cass (1996) comments that the endpoints of “wholeness and personhood” are maintained by current western psychological theory, which is “driven by notions of individuality, self-actualisation, personal maturity [and] development” (p. 247). These are construed as desirable outcomes, and gay men and lesbians are expected and encouraged to work through the process of coming out until the acquisition of a true, coherent identity is achieved.

Kitzinger (1987) criticises Cass (1979) for this liberal humanist philosophy, which obviates the possibility for any social systemic change. With the focus on the individual and his/her self-actualisation, lesbians and gay men are encouraged to shift their focus from the “outer world of oppression” to their internal world and take responsibility for developing integrated identities (Kitzinger, 1987, p. 56). Gay men and lesbians are expected to curb their frustration and anger experienced during *identity pride* and accept the heteronormative structures that are in place in society by the final phase, *identity synthesis* (Kitzinger, 1987). Such models present sexual identities as “individualised and depoliticised”, which allows the status quo to remain unchallenged (Kitzinger, 1987, p. 57).

As stated earlier, Troiden (1988) believes that a person’s sexuality becomes integrated with her “emotionality” in the fourth stage of development (p. 54). Thus, he contradicts himself, having asserted that identity is never fixed. Troiden’s (1988) model also obscures myriad factors, such as people’s unique paths of assuming an identity, the meanings they attach to these identities, and other settings where a person’s sexuality might be relevant (e.g., homosexuality as a form of politics).

Another coming out theorist, Coleman (1982), argues that some people never achieve an entirely congruent sexual identity. He suggests that this may be owing to negative reactions from friends and family, or the taboo against homosexuality (Coleman, 1982). Sophie (1985) also understands the notion of “identity solidarity” quite differently to stage theorists (p. 48). She believes that women may still be able to change once they have identified as lesbian (Sophie, 1985). For example, some women in Sophie’s study later began exploring heterosexual relationships after developing apparently secure lesbian identities, which does not appear uncommon for women (see Diamond, 2008; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Rust, 1993). Similar to Coleman (1982), Sophie challenges the notion that sexual identity is as fixed as stage theorists assume, and does so by highlighting the fluidity of sexuality.

2.4. Conclusion

Coming out models developed during a time when lesbians and gay men started to politically mobilise, especially in the USA, in order to gain recognition and acceptance on a societal level.

Since then, knowledge about (homo)sexual identities has been shaped by theories of coming out, and articulated on an everyday level through coming out stories. Given that coming out models, such as Cass' (1979) and Troiden's (1988), have played such an influential role in transmitting and reproducing this knowledge, it is important to consider critically how they construct lesbian and gay identities. Coming out theorists take a developmental perspective, in that they theorise around the way in which individuals undergo a process of significant events, which leads to the acquisition of a gay or lesbian identity. Within this process of "coming out", a person's sexual identity is constructed as an underlying true identity that a person progressively discovers. An indicator of a person's self-acceptance is his/her disclosure to others. However, the focus of coming out models is on the individual, which means that the context in which a person develops a sexual identity, and chooses to disclose (or not), risks being ignored. Hence, the threat of violence, socio-economic problems, or racial tensions that a person faces could be overlooked when using a coming out model to understand (homo)sexual identities. Furthermore, coming out models have developed in western contexts and do not take diversity of experience into account. With this focus on the outcome of acquiring a sexual identity, coming out models do not capture the nuances of a person's identity construction and negotiation, as these are located within specific contexts, particularly within South Africa. This leads to the following chapter, in which gay men and lesbians' identities are considered as dynamic products, which are shaped within certain socio-historical locations.

CHAPTER THREE

CONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATION OF (HOMO)SEXUAL IDENTITIES

This chapter involves a review of earlier and current literature, in which attention has been given to the variation and negotiation of (homo)sexual identities. Unlike coming out models, or studies based on the work of coming out theorists, these place an emphasis on the socio-cultural milieu that shapes a lesbian's or gay man's sexual identity, and how s/he negotiates that identity. This review of literature serves as a response to dominant theories of sexual identity development, and shall be used to provide different perspectives on (homo)sexual identity and the way that it is constructed.

The opening section of this chapter involves a consideration of lesbians' and gay men's sexual identities and how they might not be as fixed as coming out theorists assume. In addition, the disclosure of one's lesbian or gay identity shall be discussed in terms of the interactional space in which the disclosure is made, and how this is shaped by both local and broader relations of power. In the second section, heterosexism shall be addressed for the ways in which it manifests in young lesbians' and gay men's lives, and then considered in the third section for the particular effects that it has in the lives of lesbians. Lesbians' decisions either to disclose or not disclose their sexual identities shall be discussed in the fourth section in light of the contexts in which lesbians are located. Lastly, the concept of "coming out of the closet" shall be critiqued for how it constructs the disclosure of one's sexual identity, and alternative explanations shall be given for how lesbians negotiate their sexual identities and their decisions of (non)disclosure.

3.1. Negotiations and variations of sexual identity

Theorists, particularly from the social constructionist paradigm, have criticised essentialist approaches (e.g., coming out models) that define (homo)sexual identity as a "sexual core" that all gay men and lesbians share (Gamson, 2003, p. 548). Epstein (1996, as cited in Gamson, 2003) explains that "sexual meanings, identities, and categories were intersubjectively negotiated social and historical products... sexuality was in a word, constructed" (p. 549). These assertions still remain applicable to understanding identity construction today. Within this section, firstly, I shall discuss how (homo)sexual identities can be viewed as more fluid than coming out models allow. Secondly, I shall explain the different audiences to whom lesbians and gay men can disclose their

sexual identities, and how these audiences are shaped by specific social, historical and cultural contexts.

3.1.1. Fluidity of sexuality

A number of studies have indicated that sexuality may not be as fixed as gay and lesbian developmental research has proposed. For example, Klein, Sepekoff, and Wolf (1985) administered the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid to 384 heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual people in the USA to assess the multiple variables (such as sexual attraction, sexual behaviour, social preference, etc.) that make up a person's sexual identity. After implementing the study, they criticised the simplistic labels of heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual, and point out that "many [people] are potentially capable of travelling over a large segment of the sexual orientation continuum" (Klein et al., 1985, p. 45). Klein et al. (1985) also believe that the fluidity of sexuality has been overlooked in developmental studies.

Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995) conducted a study with 80 women in the UK who developed a lesbian identity after reporting at least 10 years of heterosexual involvement. Using a discursive analysis of these women's interviews, Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995) believe that claiming a lesbian identity is a process of "self-reconstruction" (p. 102). Rust (1992, 1993), in a similar vein, implemented a study with 323 bisexual and/or lesbian women in the USA. Notably, only one third of the women who identified as lesbian stated that they were one hundred per cent attracted to women. In addition, Rust (1993) found that some participants often changed their identities, while others maintained the same identity (as bisexual or lesbian) after they had rejected their previous heterosexual identity. Rust's findings show that changes in sexual identity are common, rather than the exception. Moreover, the fact that a substantial number of participants reported varying attraction to different sexes shows that sexuality exists on more of a continuum than coming out models allow.

In her study of lesbian identity development, Sophie (1985) critically examines the social, historical and political contexts that have shaped explanations of sexual identity development. Sophie (1985) concludes that lesbian identity development, or any change in sexual orientation, must be considered in light of the surrounding context. This could include the current social and political attitudes toward homosexuality, the friends and relationships women have, and the time

and place in which they live. This is exemplified by one of the participants in Sophie's (1985) study, who was involved in relationships exclusively with other women for thirteen years before she started to date men. She chose not to label her sexuality, but consciously chose a new path, citing that it would be "easier to be heterosexual in [her mid-western American] society", and that she wanted the "social approval that she could get in a relationship with a man" (p. 43). What is immediately evident in this example is the way in which sexual identity is fluid and open to change. It is also clear that, in Sophie's (1985) study, the woman's decision to enter a heterosexual relationship is based on the power that is attached to the heterosexual position. In other words, although she was involved in same-sex relationships, she eventually became involved in a heterosexual relationship in order to gain acceptance within a society in which heterosexuality is the norm. Therefore, taking up a lesbian (or gay) identity does not occur in a straightforward way, but is affected by the socio-cultural context in which the person exists.

Diamond (2008) comes to similar conclusions, based on the findings of her longitudinal study in the USA of 89 lesbian, bisexual and unlabelled women. She explains that the majority of her participants switched between labels (lesbian, bisexual, unlabelled or heterosexual) at least once, but continued to view their previous attractions and relationships as legitimate rather than as phases (Diamond, 2008). Diamond believes that women who choose to be unlabelled are not confused; instead, they recognise that their sexuality is fluid, and that labels cannot encompass this adequately. Women's sexuality, according to Diamond (2008), is more fluid than men's, and is more likely to be shaped by contextual factors, such as meeting the right person, regardless of her/his sex. Diamond (2008) points out that when women appear to change their sexual identity (e.g., from labelling themselves as lesbian to straight) they are most often judged (both in empirical literature and popular accounts) as having experienced a "false consciousness", or that they were not "really" lesbian (p. 50). This is evident in the various labels that circulate, such as "heteroflexibility" and "has-bian" (Diamond, 2008, p. 1). By acknowledging experiences of sexual fluidity, one can understand how sexuality is broader than coming out models depict and move away from strictly regulating who "counts" as lesbian or gay.

Sexual fluidity is also evident in Oswald's (2000) study of six women (bisexual and lesbian) and 25 significant people in each of their lives. Her study consisted of interviews to ascertain how "coming out" affected the relationships between the female participant and a few of her most

important people (Oswald, 2000). While the findings of her study shall be discussed later, it is necessary to point out that Oswald (2000) discovered a woman's disclosure triggered a reaction for some people to test their own sexuality. For example, some family members and friends of the one participant reconsidered their own sexual identities, and a few even changed their sexual orientation. This highlights the interaction of one's sexual identity with broader social relations, and emphasises the fluidity of sexuality. The disclosure of one's sexuality to others shall be addressed below.

3.1.2. Contexts of disclosure

Coming out theorists and those interested in the context of sexual identity formation agree that there are various audiences to whom lesbians and gay men commonly disclose. As discussed in the previous chapter, disclosure has been constructed as an integral part of accepting one's (homo)sexual identity, in that a person must voice her sexual identity to another person in order to create a sense of congruence between her public and private identities (see Cass, 1979). The act of disclosure forms a specific interactional space, that of the speaker and listener, in which the listener (or audience) can express a range of reactions. Furthermore, this interaction is surrounded by relations of power both on a micro- and macro-level, which will shape how disclosure is made and received.

The three audiences that appear to be most frequently cited within gay and lesbian studies are oneself, other gay and lesbian people, and heterosexual people in one's life. While the experience may differ for each individual, studies have shown that "coming out" to oneself generally occurs before a person makes the decision to disclose to others (Cohen & Savin-Williams, 1996; Evans & Broido, 1999; Mosher, 2001). Notably, this is a point of agreement shared by coming out theorists (i.e., Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1988) and critics of coming out models.

Secondly, the disclosure of one's sexuality to other LGB people has been constructed as a way of gaining much needed support and acceptance. However, this acceptance does not necessarily promise an acceptance of a person's racial, gender, or religious identity (Moorhead, 1999, as cited in Mosher, 2001). This aspect of non-acceptance is something that coming out theorists ignore in their models, where they frequently emphasise the unconditional acceptance of the lesbian and gay community.

The fact that not all lesbians and gay men gain support from the LGB community is important to keep in mind when considering the South African context. In the two previous chapters, I addressed how a person's sexual identity can interact with her racial, cultural or gender identity. As was discussed, this means that lesbians can experience their sexuality very differently, based on how their multiple identities intersect (Abes & Jones, 2004). For example, the LGB subculture is still largely shaped by social, racial and economic rifts that have become entrenched in South Africa. Therefore, a "black" lesbian studying at a historically white university might choose not to get involved in the LGB society, because she does not feel welcome in a predominantly "white" social space. Hence, a lesbian's or gay man's disclosure to other LGB people has to be considered in terms of the interactional context. In this example, the decision not to disclose or interact with this community is not only based on personal choice, but is shaped by wider social practices, namely, the historical divisions that have formed in South Africa.

The third audience to which a lesbian or gay man can disclose generally consists of heterosexual people, such as parents, family members, friends, fellow students or co-workers. While it might appear to be challenging to disclose to heterosexual people, this audience does not always represent a lack of acceptance. As Evans and Broido (1999) note, "coming out to each of these audiences [is] a very distinct process with different costs and benefits, as well as different levels of risk" (p. 662). Nevertheless, in South Africa many lesbians (and gay men) choose not to disclose to heterosexual people in their community, as they face the threat of violence and non-acceptance (Nkabinde & Morgan, 2005), which shall be discussed later. The varying reactions that lesbians and gay men potentially face are therefore important to keep in mind when considering a person's decision of (non)disclosure. Moreover, the reactions that LGB people experience from others are closely tied to the specific interpersonal relationships and social conditions in which the disclosure is made, and, therefore, these reactions will vary from moment to moment.

When gay men and lesbians choose to verbally or non-verbally disclose their sexual identity, or when they are forced to do so (i.e., being "outed" by someone) they can face numerous responses. In Oswald's (2000) study, disclosure could be painful at times for the participants, when people close to these women directed their anger and confusion towards them. Nevertheless, disclosure also caused members in the participants' social networks to communicate more, and ask questions, in order to understand bisexuality or lesbianism better (Oswald, 2000). As Oswald (2000)

reported, the disclosure of one's sexual identity has the potential to challenge and improve communication and relationships within a person's life. Hence, disclosure may very well be a positive experience, as Cohen and Savin-Williams (1996) suggest, providing a support base for a person's on-going sexual identity construction.

Gorman-Murray (2008) found similar results to Oswald (2000) in his analysis of written autobiographical "coming out" stories of LGB youth in Australia. Contrary to what he expected, Gorman-Murray (2008) discovered an overwhelming level of positive reactions in the narratives. Many parents were reported as reacting with love, and reinforcing their child's place within the family, while siblings were often described as having little trouble accepting their sibling's sexual identity (Gorman-Murray, 2008). Thus, Gorman-Murray (2008) suggests that parents' life experiences should be considered, as these can prompt them to accept and support their gay, lesbian or bisexual child.

Gorman-Murray's (2008) conclusions challenge what has become an entrenched belief: that heterosexual parents "are universally opposed to and actively oppress the same-sex attraction" of their children (p. 38). According to Gorman-Murray (2008), theory and research is often based on the assumption that heterosexuality predetermines heterosexist beliefs and reactions. This essentialises the heterosexual identity as much as any stereotype of LGB identities and should be avoided. The heterosexism that lesbians and gay men still face shall now be examined.

3.2. Life in a heteronormative world: homophobia/heterosexism

What is often termed homophobia remains a social and political hurdle in gay men and lesbians' lives, where they continue to live in a heteronormative world (Butler, 2007; Butler & Astbury, 2004; Hames, 2007; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Whitman et al., 2000). However, Herek (1996), an eminent scholar in gay and lesbian studies, suggests that homophobia is not the most suitable term. He argues that it creates the belief that prejudice against homosexuality is an anxiety problem that lies within the individual, when in fact there is no clinical or empirical support for such a belief (Herek, 1996). Moreover, it draws attention away from the social and political impact of this problem. He suggests that the term "heterosexism" be used instead. This term refers to "the ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatises any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community" (Herek, 1996, p. 101). Although

heterosexism is the more appropriate term, homophobia is still frequently used in popular and academic contexts; hence, the two terms shall be used interchangeably in the following section and throughout this thesis.

Heterosexism can pose a particular challenge to young gay men and lesbians (ranging from adolescence to early adulthood) in a number of different ways. For instance, while coming to terms with their sexual identity, lesbian and gay youth, similar to their peers, are undergoing rapid physical and psychological growth and often have to do so with little support (Nesmith, Burton & Cosgrove, 1999). If these young people do start openly articulating their sexuality, they are regularly met with discrimination and intolerance from family, peers at school, and within their communities (Rivers, 2002). These experiences shall be discussed below.

3.2.1. Family and the home environment

Although positive reactions to disclosure are possible, gay men and lesbians have reported negative reactions within their home environments. These reactions range from “covert... insidious forms of rejection” to open verbal abuse and physical violence (Rivers, 2002, p. 34). In addition, Hetrick and Martin (1987) argue that gay and lesbian youth have frequently reported feeling “distanced and detached from their families” as a result of the rejection and violence that they face (p. 33).

Pilkington and D’Augelli (1995) point out that heterosexist violence has been researched extensively and posit that it is “the most common form of bias-related violence” (p. 34). Dean, Wu and Martin (1992, as cited in Pilkington & D’Augelli, 1995) have developed three categories of victimisation that gay men and lesbians face. These are listed as:

Type I: verbal abuse (insults and threats of physical violence); Type II: minimal physical attack (having personal property damaged or destroyed; being chased, followed or spat upon; having objects thrown at one’s body); and Type III: physical assault (being punched, hit, kicked, or beaten, sexual assault, or assault with a weapon) (Pilkington & D’Augelli, 1995, p. 37).

In their study on the victimisation of 194 gay and lesbian youth in the USA, Pilkington and D’Augelli (1995) found that a third of the respondents reported Type I or verbal assault from family members and that 10% suffered physical assault at home. Significantly, female respondents endured verbal attack (22% females vs. 14% males) and physical attack (18% females

vs. 8% males) more often than males (Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995). These figures are merely used as an example, but it is important to note that females may be more at risk than males, and that the home can pose a real threat to their physical and emotional health. The threat of violence against women (regardless of age) is not unique to American contexts and poses a serious problem in South Africa particularly (see chapter one).

Very often lesbians and gay men experience various forms of violence in their home environments, and this appears particularly to be the case for “black” gay men and lesbians (Graziano, 2004a). For instance, one lesbian woman describes in a narrative study conducted in South Africa how she was sexually abused by her grandfather, and was then raped repeatedly by men in her community, while another young woman reports being raped by her cousin (Kheswa & Wieringa, 2005). Similarly, homosexuality is very often silenced in South Africa, which is supported through the discourse of ‘homosexuality is “unAfrican”’, as discussed in chapter one. In a study of intersexuality and same-sex relationships in South Africa, one participant explains that “My family does not talk about homosexuality, and if they do, they talk about stabane⁶” (Swarr, 2009, p. 532). The threat of violence and a lack of acceptance is, therefore, often apparent in the experiences of young lesbians and gay men in South Africa. The school environment shall now be addressed in terms of how heterosexism is frequently perpetuated.

3.2.2. School and university

Heterosexism is often fostered in the school environment (Butler, 2007; Ford, 2003; Little, 2001). LGB youth commonly experience ridicule, verbal abuse, and social isolation at school (Rivers, 2002). This has been reported in the USA (D'Augelli, 1996; Floyd & Stein, 2002; Remafedi, 1987), Canada (Little, 2001), the UK (Markowe, 2002; Rivers, 2002; Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000), and in South Africa (Butler, 2007). These forms of discrimination are often perpetuated by the school institution itself, where the existence of LGB students is often denied, thus rendering them invisible (Butler, 2007; Ford, 2003). Bass and Kaufman (1996, as cited in Little, 2001) believe the reason for this is that “schools mirror the problems in larger society” (p. 105). Ford (2003) notes that LGB youth receive little to no support at school regarding any developmental

⁶ A derogatory term which is found in the Sotho, Sepedi, Xhosa, Afrikaans and Zulu language to describe an intersexual person, although people who are “referred to as stabane rarely have intersexed bodies” (Swarr, 2009, p. 525).

problems or harassment issues. Some studies (e.g., Hayes & Walter, 1998, as cited in Ford, 2003) have shown that the discussion of sexual orientation is even prohibited in some schools. This outright denial of LGB youth at school would clearly compound any problems they face at home, making this period in their lives particularly challenging.

Evans and D'Augelli (1996) assert that university grants the "relative anonymity... to redefine [oneself] away from family monitoring" (p. 203). Nevertheless, the social and interpersonal problems of the school and home environments can extend to the university context. Rhoads (1997) explains that although universities appear to be progressive, they still "represent a restrictive environment for the acquisition of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity" (p. 463). Students in Evans and Broido's (1999) study in the USA admitted fear of "coming out" and listed several reasons. These included "distress at being labelled, fears and actual experiences of harassment and rejection, needing to limit behaviours to avoid unsafe situations, and negative effects on academic performance because of involvement in LGB activities" (Evans & Broido, 1999, p. 664). Similarly, Stevens (2004) reports that, despite university policies, such as adopting a "safe space" programme, heterosexism continues through "vandalism... hate-filled letters in student publications, and antigay actions at support rallies" (p. 197).

In their research with students in the UK, Rivers and Taulke-Johnson (2002) found that "homophobia is a feature of university campus life" (p. 20). Herek (1989, as cited in Rivers & Taulke-Johnson, 2002) posits that heterosexism has been recorded on every campus on which a study on LGB students has been conducted. Given more recent findings, this does not appear to have changed in the last two decades. Chase (2001) explains that students' ideas and beliefs about sexual orientation will remain unchanged "in the absence of a strong, institutionally supported public discourse" (p. 146). Hence, as long as students are not provided the opportunity to discuss issues surrounding sexuality, they will continue to follow the conservative, negative beliefs that they were taught through the media, religious teachings, or within their families, and LGB students will continue to face heterosexism (Chase, 2001).

Victimisation and discrimination is not only experienced by students in the USA and the UK, but in South Africa as well. For instance, Graziano (2004b) reports, in his study of a South African university, that participants were met with verbal and physical abuse in their university residences,

social isolation, and a paucity of support from university counsellors or faculty members. Hames (2007) believes that instead of being agents for change, South African universities have served as “sites of insidious conservatism around sexual orientation” (p. 56). Furthermore, while heterosexuality remains the norm in universities, gay and lesbian students fear being “harassed and threatened because of their sexual orientation” (Hames, 2007, p. 69).

Apart from the heterosexist practices of heterosexual students, the views that they hold about gay men and lesbians is also worthy of consideration. Arndt and de Bruin (2006) conducted a study on heterosexual university students’ attitudes towards lesbians and gay men in South Africa. The study involved 1125 undergraduate students who attended a university in Gauteng (Arndt & de Bruin, 2006). They concluded that the men in the study had greater negative beliefs about gay men and lesbians than women, but that their views towards lesbians were more positive than their views of gay men (Arndt & de Bruin, 2006). Arndt and de Bruin (2009) suggest that the males’ negative attitudes could be explained by the threat that homosexuality poses to masculinity. On the other hand, the males’ greater acceptance of lesbians could be owing to the way in which lesbians have been constructed as erotically appealing to men (Arndt & de Bruin, 2006). In addition, Arndt and de Bruin (2006) found that the students who reported themselves as “deeply religious” had the most negative attitudes toward gay men, in particular, and lesbians (p. 21). Although this study is not necessarily representative of the attitudes of heterosexual students in other universities in South Africa, it does suggest that young gay men and lesbians are still regarded in negative ways in this country.

Given the evidence presented in studies from other countries and in South Africa, it seems reasonable to believe that the university remains a difficult environment in which to negotiate one’s sexuality, regardless of the progressive and safe image that universities appear to project. In the following section, the wider social environment shall be considered for how it can support or hinder young LGB people’s experiences of sexual identity.

3.2.3. Community

Another context in which LGB youth are required to manage their sexual identities is the community in which they live (Nesmith et al., 1999). Referring back to Pilkington and D’Augelli’s (1995) study on victimisation, the authors found that 29% of the respondents “did not

feel at all comfortable” disclosing their sexuality to members of their community (p. 45). Notably, although these young people feared harm, very few had actually been hurt within their communities (Pilkington & D’Augelli, 1995). The reason for this may be that the less young people disclose their sexuality, the lower their chances are of experiencing heterosexist reactions. Possibly, the focus should not be on whether LGB youth are developing well by choosing to disclose, but, instead, more consideration should be given to the context in which they live, and what shapes their decisions not to disclose their sexuality.

On a local level, gay men and lesbians continue to face heterosexism in South African society (Britton, 2006; Butler, 2007; Cock, 2003; Graziano, 2004a, 2004b; Hames, 2007; Kheswa & Wieringa, 2005; Nkabinde & Morgan, 2005; Swarr, 2009). Both Reid (2010) and Graziano (2004b, among others, draw attention to the disparity between the legal recognition granted to gay men and lesbians and the high levels of heterosexism that continue in South Africa. It is a country that is congratulated for having one of the most “liberal” constitutions in the world, in which same-sex marriage is legal, yet it “harbours a culture that prohibits non-conformity and dictates rigid rules on what is acceptable and what is not” (Graziano, 2004b, p. 280), as discussed in chapter one. This is a country where heteronormative gender roles remain entrenched (Cock, 2003; Hames, 2007; Steyn & van Zyl, 2009), where women must fulfil their reproductive duties (Gevisser, 1994; Horn, 2006; Potgieter, 1997), and men must abide by the “strong masculine stereotype” (Butler, 2007, p. 79; Ratele, 2006). This patriarchal and heteronormative ideology is encapsulated by one participant’s father in Graziano’s (2004b) study,

All men in South Africa must play rugby and enjoy watching sport. Men are the breadwinners and must do male things. Women are passive caretakers. Men must not wear a shirt too tight or carry a bag and women must not be masculine (p. 280).

The speaker in the above text is a “white” Afrikaans male. However, strict gender roles and masculinity are not only entrenched through heterosexism in the Afrikaans culture in South Africa. For instance, “black” gay men and lesbians report being labelled in derogatory ways (e.g., as *isitabane*) and lesbians, in particular, frequently describe facing physical and sexual abuse from men living in their communities (Graziano, 2004a; Kheswa & Wieringa, 2005; Swarr, 2009). The policing of non-heterosexual bodies is, therefore, a practice which occurs in various socio-economic sectors of South African society. Hence, in a country where “the principle of rejection

based on any form of difference” continues to dominate (Butler, 2007, p. 79), it is no wonder that lesbians and gay men fear to openly express or acknowledge their sexuality.

Lesbians’ sexual identities and the way in which lesbians are treated within society, differ from the experiences of gay men and bisexual people. Given that this study focuses on the lives of lesbians, heterosexism shall now be considered for how it affects lesbians in particular.

3.3. Heterosexist oppression of lesbians

Farquhar (2000) explains that, historically, lesbian sexuality has been policed within heteronormative society in two ways. Firstly, through “discursive practices which deny the possibility or existence of lesbian sexualities”, and secondly, “through discursive processes which denigrate lesbian sexualities, such as the construction of lesbians as dangerous or abnormal” (Farquhar, 2000, p. 219). Farquhar’s assertion, about lesbian invisibility and the stigma that is attached to lesbians, shall now be discussed.

In their extensive research on lesbianism, Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995) come to the conclusion that “compulsory heterosexuality”, as defined by feminist Adrienne Rich (1987, as cited in Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995), continues to impact on the lives of women (p. 98). Drawing on Rich, Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995) argue that heterosexuality has been “managed, organised, propagandised, and maintained by force” (p. 98). When heterosexuality is normalised through practices of compulsory heterosexuality, and lesbianism is pathologised, this has the effect of entrenching and privileging heterosexual masculinity (Jagose, 1996). Thus, this hegemonic position has rendered lesbianism as the invisible “other”.

The uncontested status of heterosexuality is exemplified by what is spoken of as “the heterosexual assumption” (Whitman et al., 2000, p. 4). In other words, a woman is automatically considered to be straight, unless she gives reason to think otherwise. Whitman et al. (2000) explain that this consequently denies a lesbian’s sexual identity, and forces her to either rectify this misclassification or allow people to assume that she is heterosexual. In Swigonski’s (1995) words, “for lesbians, the form of oppression is not primarily in a relationship; it is erasure. Lesbians are not treated less than human; they are socially constructed as non-existent” (p. 417).

Herek (1996) explains that people who hold heterosexist beliefs commonly accept negative constructions and stereotypes about lesbians (and gay men). He defines negative stereotypes as “exaggerated, fixed, and derogatory beliefs based on membership in a social category or group” (Herek, 1996, p. 106). One of the ways in which lesbians are stigmatised is through the portrayal of lesbians as dangerous, “lecherous” (Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000, p. 192) or “perverse” (Farquhar, 2000, p. 223). University students in the USA, for example, have been found to construct certain negative types of lesbians (Geiger, Harwood & Hummert, 2006). These labels include, “hyper-sexual, sexually confused, sexually deviant, and angry butch” (Geiger et al., 2006, p. 171).

Eves (2004) points out that historically the “butch” identity, in particular, has “been the visible representation of lesbian desire” (p. 487) and it continues to be associated with the term lesbian (Clarke & Turner, 2007). Geiger et al. (2006) note that “butch” is described by participants in their study as “angry, dominating, defensive and humourless... masculine and unattractive in appearance” (p. 171). Although the alleged “‘real’ lesbian look is butch or masculine” (Clarke & Turner, 2007, p. 269), it is a position that continues to be denigrated within heterosexist society.

Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995) explain that participants in their study faced multiple barriers before identifying as lesbian, given the negative stereotypes in society. As one participant acknowledged, “people say we’re not normal” (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995, p. 98), which highlights how lesbianism is constructed as deviant. Young lesbians in Ussher and Mooney-Somers’ (2000; see also Mooney-Somers & Ussher, 2000) study in the UK experienced similar stigmatisation. One participant’s sister likened lesbianism to bestiality, and several other young women were counselled by teachers not to “attack younger girls”, thus conflating lesbianism with hyper-sexuality and paedophilia (Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000, p. 192). As Mooney-Somers and Ussher (2000) point out, lesbians are positioned as “other, as dangerous, as someone to be avoided or contained” (p. 87). Such stereotyping of lesbians is not only hurtful, but leads to other problems, such as ostracism or victimisation.

In South Africa, as discussed in chapter one, (“black”) lesbians very often face the threat of corrective rape for daring to go against established gender roles (Britton, 2006; Hames, 2007;

Nkabinde & Morgan, 2005). One lesbian living in a township⁷ in Johannesburg exemplifies this when she says, “Men would want to rape you just because you are a lesbian. They want to make sure or remind you that you are a woman” (Kheswa & Wieringa, 2005, p. 218). As a result, “black” lesbians often express their fear about disclosing their sexuality to others, and many choose not to disclose their sexuality or same-sex relationships to people in their lives and communities (Kheswa & Wieringa, 2005; Nkabinde & Morgan, 2005).

Although only a few examples have been mentioned, it is clear that heterosexism continues to affect lesbians, causing numerous problems in various moments of their everyday lives. Lesbians have either been rendered invisible within heteronormative society, or have been constructed as abnormal for appearing to contradict heterosexual norms. Heterosexism therefore has serious ramifications for lesbians, in terms of how they construct and negotiate their sexual identities on a day-to-day basis and within different contexts of their lives.

3.4. Sexual identity and (non)disclosure

Although the social and interpersonal difficulties of “coming out” are acknowledged within coming out models, it is assumed that there is a strong correlation between the development of a secure sexual identity and extensive disclosure of that identity to others (Harry, 1993). By taking into account the literature that has been reviewed in this chapter, it seems necessary to put forward suggestions as to how sexual identity and disclosure might be understood differently. This shall be addressed both in this section and in the following section of this chapter.

Developing a sexual identity involves a “discursive recognition and renegotiation of... identity” (Ward & Winstanley, 2005, p. 447). Instead of viewing “coming out” as a process of self discovery, as proposed by coming out theorists, Phelan (1993) argues that “it is a process of fashioning the self – a lesbian or gay self – that did not exist before coming out began” (p. 774). This is not a process that is controlled solely by the individual; rather, it is influenced by the discursive and socio-historical contexts in which a person is located.

⁷ An urban area previously designated for “non-white” people during apartheid

A person's sexual identity can be viewed "more as a performance than a knowledge, a perpetual reinvention rather than a self-discovery" (Fuss, 1989, as cited in Eliason, 1996, p. 55). Rust (1993) provides an example of how different contexts shape a lesbian's construction of her sexual identity:

A woman who occupies a progressive position vis-à-vis lesbian and gay political institutions might call herself a lesbian when speaking to her parents but call herself a queer when she attends a planning meeting for a Lesbian and Gay Pride March. Her parents have never heard of Queer Nation and would not understand the reference to this branch of sexual politics, whereas her co-planners would underestimate her affinity for other sexual and gender minorities if she identified herself as a lesbian to them (p. 69).

This is not to say that a lesbian always consciously portrays her sexual identity in a certain way. Instead, she is influenced by the interpersonal and socio-cultural context in which she finds herself. Just as a person's sexual identity is affected by the surrounding context, so is her decision to conceal or disclose her sexuality to others. The risks and benefits of disclosure, and the ways in which the decision to disclose is negotiated, shall now be examined in more detail.

3.4.1. Strategies of (non)disclosure

Griffin (1992, as cited in Ward & Winstanley, 2005) suggests four ways that LGB people manage their sexuality in the workplace. However, these strategies could be used in various contexts. First of all, passing is when a person "lies in order to be seen as heterosexual" (Ward & Winstanley, 2005, p. 450), as they need to avoid identification as gay or lesbian at all costs. The threat of victimisation, or strong cultural taboos on homosexuality might necessitate this. For example, as discussed in chapter one, "black" gay men and lesbians in South Africa (and Africa in general) frequently have to struggle against the construction of homosexuality as "un-African" and "sinful", where homosexuality is labelled a western import (Butler, 2007; Cock, 2003; Graziano, 2004a; Horn, 2006; Morgan & Wieringa, 2005).

Secondly, covering is another form of non-disclosure, whereby a person chooses not to provide certain information about her sexual identity or personal life (Ward & Winstanley, 2005). Although some people may not actively lie, they might at times still feel the need to maintain a sense of privacy about their lives. Apart from the many personal ramifications, disclosing one's sexuality can affect friends or a partner who may not be "out" (Evans & Broido, 1999; Seidman, Meeks & Traschen, 1999).

Thirdly, if a person does choose to indicate her sexual identity, this can be done by “being implicitly out” (Ward & Winstanley, 2005, p. 450). This involves dressing in a certain way (e.g., non-conformance to gendered fashion norms) or by displaying LGB symbols either on one’s clothes or belongings (Evans & Broido, 1999). Ward and Winstanley (2005) suggest that “using explicit language” is another way to be openly gay or lesbian. For example, when participants in Evans and Broido’s (1999) study did not want to explicitly say, “I am a lesbian”, they spoke about events (i.e., gay/lesbian political rallies) in their lives as if assuming people knew about their sexuality. Fourthly, a person can confirm her identity by actively encouraging people to see her as lesbian (Ward & Winstanley, 2005). This could be achieved by affirming a direct question about one’s sexuality, or by disclosing to an important person in one’s life.

There are times, however, when disclosure can be initiated by someone else, and this is termed being “outed” (Ward & Winstanley, 2005, p. 451). This is a practice which initially started as a subversive political act, which involved “exposing well-known public figures” as secretly gay, lesbian or bisexual, in an attempt to show that LGB people have been a part of heterosexual society all along (Fuss, 1991, p. 4). When a lesbian (or a gay man) is “outed” by another person, it can take place by force, or by accident (Ward & Winstanley, 2005). Either way, this removes a person’s control over the decision to disclose or not. This is significant, as LGB people are frequently denied agency within the confines of heteronormative society, and their control over this decision is valuable.

Through disclosure, be it verbal or non-verbal, lesbians and gay men continually have to re-negotiate their sexual identities. As Morris (1997) explains, lesbians (and gay men) continually have to disclose to new people and are “constantly engaging in a risk assessment of their environment” (p. 12). Seidman (2004a) also notes that “concealment and disclosure decisions, and sexual identity management are still part of the lives of lesbians and gay men in America” (p. 259). Markowe (2000) comments that, “if homosexuality were regarded [as natural or normal], disclosure” would be obsolete (p. 71). Therefore, self-disclosure will continue to pose problems for gay men and lesbians, as long as heteronormativity continues to shape society and homosexuality continues to be constructed as abnormal. Heterosexism remains a problem for lesbians and gay men, both within western contexts, such as the USA and UK, and non-western

contexts, such as South Africa. How lesbians (and gay men) negotiate their sexual identities shall be addressed below.

3.5. Sexual identity management

Sexual identity management is the process that LGB people undergo when they are required to make a choice either to conceal or disclose their sexuality (Minton & McDonald, 1984; Seidman, 2004a; Whitman et al., 2000). Seidman et al. (1999) emphasise the need to “rethink practices of sexual self-management in a way that does not collapse them into a uniform, homogenising language of the closet” (p. 28). They suggest that speaking about “the closet” and “coming out” creates a division between a person’s public and private life and that this dichotomy does not account for the life of every gay man or lesbian (Seidman et al., 1999). This point is the first to be addressed in this section. Secondly, alternative ways of understanding decisions around disclosure shall be discussed.

3.5.1. Questioning the closet

As was discussed in the previous chapter, “coming out of the closet” has become a central discourse in gay and lesbian life and has shaped knowledge about living with a lesbian or gay sexual identity. Seidman (2004a) explains that “the closet” is understood as a space in which a person suffers in a “state of self-alienation and inauthenticity” (p. 256). Furthermore, the closet exemplifies a “life-shaping pattern of homosexual concealment. To be in the closet means that individuals hide their homosexuality in the most important areas of life, with family, friends, and at work”, and they can go to drastic lengths in order to do so (Seidman, 2004b, p. 25).

This has generated a concern for gay men and lesbians, where therapeutic techniques and self-help literature have assisted lesbians and gay men to “come out”, or “confess”, to their friends, family and colleagues, to manage their sexuality on a day-to-day basis, and even provided help for their parents and siblings (Seidman et al., 1999). These are all strategies to help a person acknowledge and accept her sexuality (Seidman, 2004a), encouraging her to undergo a “process of discovery[,]... admit the truth... [and] come out of denial” (Phelan, 1993, p. 773).

One’s (homo)sexual identity has been constructed, therefore, as something that is repressed, and which needs to be uncovered, a construction which has been depicted by coming out models.

Bacon (1998) asserts that “coming out is enmeshed in an understanding of queer identities as something ‘secret’, something that must be disclosed with great care” (p. 251). Seidman et al. (1999) critique the discourse of the closet, particularly for the way in which it perpetuates and reproduces “an original, already formed homosexual self” (p. 15). Moreover, this discourse creates the assumption that the self is always constrained and repressed, until the person is out of the closet (Seidman et al., 1999). Seidman (2004a) argues against the notion of an entirely suppressed self:

If we take the closet as indicating only a state of repression and the loss of self, we cannot explain how this dominated self manages, in the end, to resist and rebel in order to recover a whole, authentic self (p. 257).

The closet has been consistently viewed as the site of secrecy, shame and repression, and this construction of living in denial has been used as motivation for LGB people to “come out”. However, Seidman (2004a) suggests that attention should be paid to the “productivity of the closet” (p. 257). For example, the closet can shape a person’s sexual identity, by providing her with a safe space in which she can construct a sense of self. Hence, the individual could develop “a heightened self-consciousness” about her sexuality, which is paradoxically brought about by society’s suppression of homosexuality (Seidman et al., 1999, p. 15). Butler (1990) similarly considers “the prior taboo against homosexuality [to be] the generative moment of gender identity” (p. 184).

Butler (1997) believes that the “discourse of ‘coming out’” has achieved its aims, but she considers the dangers or limits for employing such a discourse (p. 302). Hence, she is sceptical of describing a person as “out”, and questions whether the person is “finally in the clear” after “coming out” (p. 302). Instead, she argues that coming out creates a “new and different ‘closet’” (p. 302). Butler questions what exactly a person moves *into* when moving out of the closet. As she notes, there is an expectation of a change in circumstances that is never granted entirely (Butler, 1997). Coming out, according to Butler (1997), is founded on a polarity, in that “being ‘out’” always depends to some extent on being “in” (the closet), which grants meaning and import to the act of coming out (p. 302). She suggests that “being ‘out’ must produce the closet again and again in order to maintain itself as ‘out’” (p. 302).

The closet and coming out can be understood, therefore, as discursive constructions. Being out is merely sustained by the notion of the closet (i.e., something to be out of). Furthermore, Butler

(1997) raises a significant point that speaking of “coming out” may not in fact be entirely correct, given the on-going series of disclosures that a person faces throughout her lifetime. Although a person may have come out to a number of significant people, as soon as she meets a new person she is back in the closet, negotiating her way out again (Sedgwick, 1990).

3.5.2. Normalisation and routinisation

Seidman et al. (1999) argue that we may have moved “beyond the closet”, because people are making different decisions about disclosing their sexuality, namely, how they can integrate their sexuality into their everyday lives. Seidman (2004a) theorises that LGB people now appear to be engaging in two processes, which he terms “normalisation” and “routinisation” (p. 258). Any attempt at normalisation signals a person’s “internal acceptance” of herself, while an instance of external support or acceptance is an example of routinisation (Seidman, 2004a, p. 258).

If we are to move beyond talking about the closet, then Seidman’s (2004a) point of view might prove to be an effective alternative. Normalisation means that homosexuality is understood as a subjective feeling of being natural or normal (Seidman et al., 1999). Although a person might at times experience residual feelings of guilt or shame, Seidman et al. (1999) explain that this can be interpreted as an effect of living in a “normatively heterosexual society” (p. 19). Thus, normalisation leads a person to disclose her identity to people in her life, be more open about her relationship, and so forth (Seidman et al., 1999). This can result in “interpersonal routinisation”, when other people express acceptance and show support (Seidman et al., 1999, p. 20). “Institutional routinisation” can also take place, when practices or policies support lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people (Seidman et al., 1999).

Seidman’s (2004a) concepts of routinisation and normalisation are useful ways of explaining how LGB people can view their sexual identities in positive ways, and how they can receive support and acceptance from other people in their lives or on a broader social level. Given that this study is grounded in the social constructionist perspective, “routinisation” and “normalisation” are considered as social constructions, rather than manifestations of an individual’s inner feelings or reflections of reality. Normalisation can thus be considered in terms of how a person constructs her sexual identity as “normal” in the way that she speaks about her sexuality. Interpersonal routinisation can be identified by the ways in which a lesbian talks about other people expressing

their acceptance of her sexual identity and how she constructs other people as supportive. Furthermore, routinisation on an interpersonal level can be considered for how it is expressed by people in everyday interactions and through certain practices. Policies which support LGB people, or examples of institutional routinisation, are important to acknowledge because these are shaped by relations of power, and constitute homosexuality on a societal level.

This sense of normalisation is indicated in the new ways in which young gay men and lesbians are starting to narrate their lives and sexual identities. As Hammack and Cohler (2009) point out, when gay men and lesbians utilise a “narrative of emancipation”, they are seen to question the need to have a life narrative that is different to that of heterosexuals (e.g., the coming out story) and they question the separatist effects of being part of the LGB community (p. 4). This is indicative of the move into what some theorists term a “postidentity phase”, where a fixed sexual identity might no longer be the central theme in the narratives of lesbians and gay men (Cohler & Hammack, 2009, p. 455). It is important to recognise that not all LGB people will find this narrative, or way of constructing their sexual identity, meaningful. Consideration should be given, therefore, to the way in which a speaker is enabled to use this narrative within a particular context. A person’s decisions of (non)disclosure can be viewed in a similar way.

Studies involving university students have shown that some people decide to disclose their sexual identity if they sense support on a social or institutional level (Chase, 2001; Evans & Broido, 1999). A person is more likely to disclose if she feels that she will receive encouragement from those around her or if she lives, works or studies in a context that seems to acknowledge LGB people. What can also encourage a person to tell others is if there are lesbian or gay role models who act as visible examples of people living openly as gay or lesbian (Evans & Broido, 1999). However, this does not appear to be a factor in South Africa, where LGB role models have been reported as scarce (Graziano, 2004a, 2004b; Kheswa & Wieringa, 2005). A person might also talk about wanting to develop a stronger and more open relationship with someone and, thus, choose to disclose to them (Oswald, 2000). In Seidman’s (2004a) words,

[H]omosexuality is often likened to something personal such as an intimate relationship or a deep religious conviction that one only tells some people not out of fear or shame but depending on the degree of familiarity or intimacy established or desired (p. 259).

Routinisation is, however, often constructed as incomplete, since LGB people continue to face heterosexist attitudes and social policies that position them as inferior (Seidman, 2004a; Seidman et al., 1999). Ussher and Mooney-Somers (2000) note in their work with young lesbians that some chose not to disclose to particular people in their lives, including school peers, certain family members or friends. A person's decisions of non-disclosure can be influenced by social or economic reasons. For example, if a young woman is still financially dependent on her parents then her disclosure may result in a loss of economic security. The fear of social isolation and/or victimisation might also compel a person not to make her sexuality known (Butler, 2007; Evans & Broido, 1999; Hames, 2007; Kheswa & Wieringa, 2005; Morgan & Wieringa, 2005; Whitman et al., 2000).

Choosing not to disclose can be considered a complex decision that is continually re-negotiated and influenced by a number of considerations. This can include thinking about who one is speaking to, what is at stake (e.g., a job or career) and what the risks are (e.g., physical harm, economic downfall, etc.) (Seidman et al., 1999). For instance, lesbians and gay men living in South Africa and in other African countries may be compelled not to disclose, given that they face high levels of gender-, race- and especially sexuality-based violence and legal prohibitions against homosexuality. Thus, a person's decision to disclose her sexuality can be reinterpreted as something that is influenced by practices of (non)routinisation and the fluctuating degrees to which these practices occur within specific social-historical contexts.

If sexual identity and the disclosure of this identity are viewed as contingent upon contextual factors, then it seems possible that LGB people could adopt any of these strategies at different points in their lives. Furthermore, a person's decisions to disclose or not should be considered as indicative of the social, political, and historical space in which a person finds herself. Heterosexism undoubtedly continues to affect LGB people, and I argue that a person's decision not to disclose her sexual identity should not be judged as a step back into "the closet", but rather should be seen as part of an active negotiation of her sexual identity while living within heterosexist and heteronormative conditions.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that sexual identities should be considered for how they are constructed within specific socio-cultural contexts which coming out theorists largely ignore. The fluidity of sexuality has been silenced within coming out studies, which has led to the notion that sexual identity is fixed. As I point out, however, lesbians constantly re-work their identities through the decisions they make around disclosure. The disclosure of a lesbian's sexual identity also depends upon the heterosexism that she faces in her life, which can occur at home, at school and within the wider community. As I illustrate, lesbians' decisions to disclose or not are contextually-shaped and should be considered in light of the interpersonal and social conditions in which these decisions are made. Finally, in this chapter, an alternative approach to sexual identity is considered, namely, that of sexual identity management. When one considers sexuality from this viewpoint, one can see the continual process of negotiation that gay men and lesbians undergo in their lives, where they continually reconstruct their sexual identities in light of the acceptance and support (or lack thereof) that they receive within certain relationships and environments. This approach is particularly applicable to understanding lesbians' sexual identities in South Africa, in that lesbians are required to renegotiate their identities within a society in which heteronormative and patriarchal relations of power prevail, and which continues to be marked by a history of violence and racial divisions.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION: NARRATIVE-DISCURSIVE APPROACH

Who I am is not a noun, but a narrative (Clausen, 1999, p. 248).

Narrative inquiry is a theoretical and methodological approach that has developed within qualitative research as a means to interpret and understand human action (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Today, narrative theory is a burgeoning field (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008), in which a story is thought to be one of the most important and valid units of analysis of lived experience (Fraser, 2004). Sarbin (1998) asserts that “narrative is an organising principle for contemporary psychology” (p. 15), and Plummer (1995) comments that,

[s]tories have recently moved centre stage in social thought. In anthropology, they are seen as the pathways to understanding culture. In psychology, they are the bases of identity. In history, they provide the tropes for making sense of the past. In psychoanalysis, they provide ‘narrative truths’ for analysis (pp. 180-181).

However, narrative theory is by no means a unified field of inquiry (Smith & Sparkes, 2008; Squire, 2005). Instead, it is an “amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods” (Chase, 2005, p. 651). The reason for such diversity could be that the term “narrative” can be defined in different ways, just as narrative analysis itself can follow numerous disciplinary traditions (Squire et al., 2008). Hence, there are many ways to understand and study the self, while basing one’s work in narrative inquiry.

In the first section of this chapter, I shall discuss two approaches that are taken in narrative psychology, namely, the psychosocial view and the storied resource perspective. These are only two of many approaches that can be utilised to study identity construction within narratives. The reason these particular perspectives shall be explained and discussed is that the concepts of identity and narrative are understood quite differently by theorists from each of these approaches. While psychosocial theorists focus on the individual’s experience of identity, storied resource theorists view identity as socially constructed (Smith & Sparkes, 2008).

Taylor and Littleton’s (2006) narrative-discursive approach, which can be identified as a storied resource approach, shall be explained extensively in the second section of this chapter. Narratives are conceptualised by Taylor (2006) and Taylor and Littleton (2006) as entities that are constructed through language by discursive resources (socially relevant ways of speaking or

narrating), and are shaped by surrounding socio-cultural conditions. In the third section, I shall address the ways in which narratives can facilitate and constrain a person's identity construction or, "identity work" (Taylor, 2005a). Identity is theorised, from the narrative-discursive perspective, as open to re-construction, depending on the social and interpersonal context in which a person finds herself.

The fourth section shall consider particular aspects of Foucault's (1978/1990) analytics of power for how they can be incorporated with the narrative-discursive approach. I shall show, by drawing on certain of Foucault's (1978/1990) concepts, how people's identities are constructed within and contingent upon particular socio-historical and geographical networks. By applying a Foucauldian lens, I aim to explore how lesbians negotiate relations of power (such as heteronormativity) and construct their sexual identities, while living in the context of post-apartheid South Africa and while studying at a historically white university.

4.1. Narrative perspectives of identity

Depending on their theoretical positions, narrative theorists disagree in terms of their emphasis on the individual (or personal) and social aspects of identities and narratives (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). I contrast two approaches that are labelled by Smith and Sparkes (2008) as the "psychosocial" (p. 8), and the "storied resource" perspectives (p. 16). The purpose of this discussion is to give insight into some of the points of theoretical disagreement regarding the conceptualisation of narratives and identity by narrative theorists (Smith & Sparkes, 2008).

4.1.1. Psychosocial perspective

Psychosocial theorists are concerned with the individual self, which they believe is constructed through a combination of internal and external influences (Day Sclater, 2003). Language is viewed from the psychosocial standpoint as influential in shaping the self, but psychosocial theorists believe that a consideration for language should not obscure people's "psychic realities" (Day Sclater, 2003, p. 319). Thus, narratives are understood as conduits through which a person's sense of self and experiences are expressed or, as Freeman (2003) describes, the narrative is a "vehicle for conveying some of the richness, depth, and profundity of the human experience" (p. 334).

Narrative theorists working from the psychosocial orientation tend to focus predominantly on the individual. This is in response to a fear that too great an emphasis on language has erased the human subject in the field of discursive psychology (see Crossley, 2003; Day Sclater, 2003). For instance, Day Sclater (2003) warns that if too much attention is paid to language, as opposed to the “real” person, there is a “danger of reducing the subject to an effect of language” (p. 319).

Revising her earlier constructionist position, Crossley (2003) believes that any strong emphasis on the social construction of selves obviates “any fundamental or *internal* ‘sense’” a person has of herself (p. 289, emphasis added). From a psychosocial perspective, internal (e.g., the unconscious dimension, or feelings) as well as external factors (e.g., language) are taken into account when considering subjectivity (Day Sclater, 2003). How a person occupies and experiences her body is an aspect of subjectivity that is taken seriously by psychosocial theorists (Day Sclater, 2003; Freeman, 2003). As Freeman (2003) explains, “the primary interest... is in flesh and blood people” and their lived experiences (p. 334).

Smith and Sparkes (2008) comment that, from this standpoint, the self is thought to be “housed primarily within an individual” (p. 9). Therefore, an identity is understood as “an internalised life story that develops over time through self-reflection” (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 9). Crossley (2003) argues that as subjects “we orient towards the world with an implicit sense of temporal coherence, connection, order and experiential unity” during everyday life (p. 292). Thus, psychosocial theorists aim to consider both an internal and external reality of the self.

Given the importance with which the individual subject is endowed in this perspective, the way in which a speaker’s agency is theorised requires attention. Crossley (2003) reasons that traditional psychological theories that support a realist conception of the self fail to recognise the influential role that language plays in shaping people’s interactions and experiences. Although Day Sclater believes that subjects are shaped by language, she suggests that speakers have the agency to use discourses or narratives for their own purposes, in order to attach meaning to their lives (Andrews, Day Sclater, Squire & Tamboukou, 2004). As Day Sclater (2003) posits, the subject is a “self-reflective meaning-maker” (p. 319). Hence, a person is understood as an agentic storyteller, who

creates meaning and a sense of coherence about her life through her “internalised and evolving life narrative” (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 10).

As Smith and Sparkes (2008) note, this understanding of agency appears to be influenced by humanistic theories. Freeman (2003) himself acknowledges that theorists from this perspective are “humanistically-oriented” (p. 334). In the same way, Singer (2004, as cited in Smith & Sparkes, 2008) celebrates theorists’ “humanistic concern with how individuals look for meaning and spiritual depth in life” (p. 12). Potter and Wetherell (1987) explain that, from a humanist perspective, the self is assumed to have a high degree of agency, and is a character that can shape social forms and be influenced by them. This focus on individuals’ search for internal meaning and unity is reflected in the work of Day Sclater (2003), Crossley (2003), and Freeman (2003).

Following this, psychosocial theorists consider narrative to be “an expression of identity” (Squire, 2005, p. 103), as well as “an ‘organising principle’ for human action and life” (Crossley, 2003, p. 291). Freeman (2003), for example, notes that language is a tool that a person can use “to shape experience and selfhood” (p. 336). Moreover, self-narration is viewed by theorists such as McAdams (2005, as cited in Smith & Sparkes, 2008) as a means to achieve “untold potentials of meaning” (p. 12). This is further emphasised by McAdams’ (1993) statement that a person can suffer from “malaise and stagnation that come with an insufficient narration of human life” (p. 166).

Smith and Sparkes (2008) critique psychosocial theorists for the way in which they “end up drifting into a version of (neo)realism” (p. 10). Smith and Sparkes (2008) define (neo)realists as those who believe in a “reality out there independent of their knowledge of it”, but who also believe that they can never be certain whether they have portrayed that reality accurately (p. 30). In their focus on the individual, psychosocial theorists assume that there is an inner “reality” of the self that includes “real” thoughts and feelings. For instance, McAdams (1993) argues for a realist approach to narrative, in that it “is there all along, inside the mind” (p. 10). Within this perspective, Smith and Sparkes (2008) point out, that “in order to know who we are we need to *discover* this unconscious story, to make it explicit and conscious” (p. 10, emphasis in original).

In short, psychosocial theorists such as Day Sclater (2003), Crossley (2003), and Freeman (2003) focus on individual subjectivity and how narratives can be expressions of the self, rather than placing a strong emphasis on social influences. Psychosocial theorists may not have set out to adopt a realist perspective, and have critiqued mainstream approaches to the study of the self (e.g., Crossley, 2003; Day Sclater, 2003). However, at times it seems that they fall back on assumptions that reify the self. That is, given their criticism of theories in which language is privileged, these theorists attempt to reclaim the “real”, inner self, the human agent, whom they believe has been lost in narrative psychology. As Smith and Sparkes (2008) point out, this has led to (neo)realist and humanistic understandings of the self.

4.1.2. Storied resource perspective

There are narrative theorists who are sceptical of the psychosocial approach, who believe that people are inextricably tied to society, and who eschew any foundationalist explanations for identity (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). From the storied resource perspective, the self is thought to be submerged in culture, and people’s words and actions are understood as products of interactional contexts. Smith and Sparkes (2008) term this “the storied resource perspective”, but theorists oriented in this area tend to consider their work as discursive approaches to narrative (see Reynolds, Wetherell & Taylor, 2007; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). These researchers focus on the way in which identity and narratives are discursively achieved within socio-cultural frameworks, rather than placing importance on notions of an interior sense of self (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). In contrast to the psychosocial approach, less attention is paid to the individual, and identity is considered only inasmuch as it relates to the social.

Within the storied resource perspective, theorists do not assume that the self is an extra-discursive phenomenon. Rather, they analyse the way in which identity is constructed through language (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). As Taylor and Littleton (2006) explain, a person’s story and identity is “a situated construction, produced for, and constituted within each new occasion of talk but shaped by previously presented versions and also by understandings which prevail in the wider discursive environment, such as expectations about the appropriate trajectory of a life” (p. 23).

People’s narratives are both personal and influenced by “broader and more local cultural narrative resources” (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 17). Narrative theorists, such as Taylor (2005a, 2005b,

2006), Taylor and Littleton (2006), and Reynolds et al. (2007) believe that speakers are restricted, to some extent by the narratives that they can tell, but are also provided with resources that facilitate narration. “While personalised over time”, Smith and Sparkes (2008) note, “stories are drawn from a limited repertoire of available narrative resources” (p. 18). Although narratives of identity are imbued with personal meaning and unique events, they are also shaped by socio-cultural and historical factors that determine what can be said and done at any one time.

Psychosocial theorists appear to imply that narratives are internal psychological phenomena used by the individual for her own means (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). From the storied resource perspective, narratives are conceptualised rather as forms of social action, which provide subject positions that shape and constrain identities (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). Thus, narratives are analysed for the ways in which they operate and are used by speakers as a resource in specific situations (Taylor, 2006).

Taylor (2006) argues that when a discursive approach is taken to narrative, a narrative can be understood both as a construction and as a resource. Narratives are constructed in that they are shaped by wider social meanings, or, “accumulated ideas, images, [and] associations” that are available within particular contexts (Taylor, 2006, p. 94). How narratives are constructed shall be addressed in the next section. In turn, narratives shall be discussed in the third section for how they can work as resources, namely, how a speaker’s identity can be facilitated and constrained through narrative (Taylor, 2006).

4.2. Narrative as construction

Taylor (2003) suggests that a narrative should be viewed as a “discursive construction...[,] as a temporally linked structure of connection and continuity that is not given directly by events but produced within... talk through a speaker’s reflexive work” (p. 194). From the narrative-discursive perspective, a narrative is understood as produced through language, or broader social meanings and ways of speaking, and constituted within specific socio-cultural contexts. I shall firstly explain how discursive resources are defined within the narrative-discursive perspective. This shall specifically involve a discussion of interpretative repertoires and canonical narratives, which are socially-determined resources that enable everyday conversation and storytelling. Secondly, I shall explain how a narrative is structured within a western context, in order to explain

how narrative structure is dependent upon socially-established understandings of what constitutes “good storytelling”. Furthermore, I shall utilise the example of the coming out story and illustrate how it follows a particular sequence of narration. Lastly, I shall discuss how a narrative is not only shaped by wider social meanings, but is contingent upon the interpersonal context as well; that is, how the narrative is told depends on the speakers involved in the telling of the narrative.

4.2.1. Discursive resources

Narratives are not produced by individuals in isolation. Rather, they are constantly shaped by the cultural and socio-historical milieu in which the narrator is located. The stories that people tell about themselves, termed personal narratives (Gergen, 1994), or biographical talk (Taylor & Littleton, 2006), or about events in the world, are shaped by cultural definitions of what stories are salient. Fraser (2004) believes that stories reflect societies, because they “call upon cultural modes of reasoning and representation” (p. 180). This could be owing to the fact that discursive resources, such as interpretative repertoires, influence the telling of narratives (Taylor & Littleton, 2006).

4.2.1.1. Interpretative repertoires

One resource that Reynolds et al. (2007), Taylor (2003, 2005a, 2006) and Taylor and Littleton (2006) consider in their work is an “interpretative repertoire”, as conceptualised by Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 138). Potter and Wetherell (1987) define an interpretative repertoire as “a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterise and evaluate actions and events” (p. 138). Edley (2001) explains that they are “building blocks of conversation, a range of linguistic resources that can be drawn upon in the course of everyday social interaction” (p. 198). Thus, interpretative repertoires can be understood as discursive resources that speakers have access to when involved in various social episodes, such as conversations or storytelling.

The interpretative repertoires that are available are socially determined, in that they are “familiar and well-worn images that are known and understood through shared cultural membership” (Reynolds et al., 2007, p. 335). Similarly, Taylor and Littleton (2006) explain that they enable “established interconnections of meanings and associations” that speakers share through a common language, and that render social interaction intelligible (p. 26). Depending on the

repertoires that are available within a society, people will think and speak about the world in certain ways (Edley, 2001).

Wetherell (1998) later describes an interpretative repertoire as “a culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised of recognisable themes, common places and tropes” (p. 400). Thus, people draw on established ways of understanding and speaking about the world. This means that repertoires do not necessarily follow any “logic or rational argument” (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 30). Instead, they are “patterns [which can be found] across different people’s talk, particular images, metaphors or figures of speech” (Edley, 2001, p. 199) that are consistently tied to a subject.

Interpretative repertoires can be viewed as resources that construct subjects, such as race, gender, or sexuality. Edley (2001) explains that repertoires are socially-established ways of speaking that determine what can be said about various topics. For instance, whatever interpretative repertoires are in circulation around “lesbians” will construct how lesbians are understood in a particular time and place. As Taylor and Littleton (2006) point out, “talk is constitutive” and “meanings are not the stable properties of objects in the world but are constructed, carried and modified in talk and interaction” (p. 24). Therefore, subjects, such as sexuality, should be viewed as contingent upon discursive resources, and the prevailing constructions that are utilised at a certain point in time.

Multiple interpretative repertoires can form around the same subject (Edley, 2001). All talk is located within a specific socio-historical context, but speakers are offered different repertoires from both current and historical moments in time, with which to talk about certain topics (Edley, 2001). Hence, “a language culture may supply a whole range of ways of talking about or constructing an object or event, and speakers are therefore bound to make choices” (p. 190). Various repertoires can be used in reference to the same subject, but which repertoires are used depends upon the individual speaker.

Reynolds et al. (2007) describe conversations, or narratives, as unique but also “made up of a patchwork of ‘quotations’ from various interpretative repertoires” (p. 335). However, speakers do not mindlessly repeat common ways of talking, but actively draw on sets of resources that are available in a specific context (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). People’s conversations and stories are

never exactly the same, and there is “often no telling how [they] will turn out” (Edley, 2001, p. 198).

Hole (2007) comments that social and “cultural representations and language are tools with which we construct meanings of lived experience” (p. 699). As I shall explain in section three, discursive resources facilitate speakers’ constructions of identity, by providing familiar ways of speaking, but that these additionally constrain what can be said. Therefore, any analysis of biographical talk should include a consideration of how speakers’ personal narratives are coloured by established cultural ideas (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 26) and how this is negotiated.

4.2.1.2. Canonical narratives

“Canonical narratives”, as defined by Bruner (1987, as cited in Taylor & Littleton, 2006) and as employed by Taylor and Littleton (2006) can be understood as another type of resource that constructs people’s narratives. Bruner (1987) believes that canonical life narratives “reflect the prevailing theories about ‘possible lives’ that are part of one’s culture” (p. 15). Furthermore, canonical narratives are “expected connections of sequence and consequence which create narrative structure and trajectories” and, therefore, provide particular ways of storying a life (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 26). Taylor and Littleton explain that a canonical narrative is a resource, in that it is an established or recognisable biographical narrative that “does identity work for... speakers” (p. 31). Similarly, Smith and Sparkes (2008) believe that “individuals draw from a cultural repertoire of available stories larger than themselves that they then assemble into personal stories” (p. 19).

Canonical narratives bear some resemblance to interpretative repertoires, in that they provide culturally recognisable ways of characterising events and phenomena in one’s life (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). As Taylor (2006) comments, canonical narratives equip people with “a logic for talking about personal circumstances, life stories and decisions” (p. 97). However, unlike interpretative repertoires, canonical narratives provide certain patterns of temporal ordering, in addition to particular consequences or endpoints that are socially and culturally determined.

Given that interpretative repertoires represent socially established ways of speaking, these discursive resources can make up particular canonical narratives. In other words, a canonical

narrative firstly provides a framework in which a speaker can narrate events in a recognisable way. Secondly, while utilising a canonical narrative, a speaker can be seen to draw on certain interpretative repertoires, in order to talk about and construct events within the story in socially familiar terms.

The coming out story can be understood, for example, as a canonical narrative, as lesbians and gay men have learned to reproduce a formulaic and culturally recognisable pattern of describing the process of developing a homosexual identity (Bacon, 1998). This works as a canonical narrative, because it is based on dominant understandings of homosexual development (see chapter two), which provide speakers with a framework of meaning in which to structure and interpret their lives and experiences (Cohler & Hammack, 2009). For instance, when using this narrative, a speaker would narrate her experience of progressively acquiring a lesbian identity. There would be certain understandings or ways of speaking that the speaker would draw upon. An example of this would be a speaker talking about “realising” her identity. These common ways of talking about a lesbian identity would indicate the interpretative repertoires that make up this canonical narrative.

4.2.2. Structure of narratives

Gergen and Gergen (1986) suggest that narratives function in two ways. By structuring events in a certain way, they firstly produce “a connectedness or coherence, and secondly, a sense of movement or direction through time” (p. 25). Kenneth Gergen (1994) discusses the structure of narratives extensively, which shall be outlined below.

Narratives are culturally constructed, which means that what constitutes “well-formed narratives” depends on historical and cultural conditions (Gergen, 1994, p. 189). Thus, a story is expected to contain a number of properties in order to count as meaningful and credible. The narrative conventions that Gergen (1994) puts forward are drawn from a review of theories on narrative form in western society presented over the last few decades. Gergen’s aim is not to suggest a universal structure of narratives. Instead, he is more interested in explaining how narratives are presently structured in western culture, and specifically, how narrative forms are cultural constructs. What may be considered salient narrative forms in one culture or era may not necessarily apply in others, such as western stories in post-apartheid South Africa. However, for the purposes of this study, I shall discuss the way in which western narratives are structured, in

order to explain how the coming out story, which developed in a Euro-American context, reflects western understandings of what constitutes a coherent story.

First of all, a coherent narrative must contain a “valued endpoint” (Gergen, 1994, p. 190). The narrator must identify some event or state of significance which serves as the goal and central point of the story. The endpoint additionally needs to hold some sort of cultural value, which provides meaning to the narrative. Yet no endpoint holds any “intrinsic value” (p. 190); instead, it is constructed as positive or negative based on cultural views and ideals.

This is noticeable in the construction of sexual storytelling, which has changed over time (Plummer, 1995). For example, the acquisition of a gay or lesbian identity has been reconstructed as a positive achievement (Plummer, 1995). Hammack and Cohler (2009) describe the endpoint of the coming out story as the “resilient triumph of self-actualisation” (p. 4). Coming out has become “the central narrative of *positive* gay experience” (Plummer, 1995, p. 84, emphasis added).

Secondly, events that are included in a narrative are expected to be “relevant to the endpoint” (Gergen, 1994, p. 191). What is included needs to show some direction towards achieving the established conclusion, or that depicts the endpoint of the narrative as imaginable or significant. However, this also constrains what is included in the narrative, as stories are expected to maintain a sense of coherence and logic (Gergen, 1994). When considering the coming out story, there are events that have been defined as central in the development of a lesbian or gay identity. One example of an event could be a person’s distress over her sexuality (Plummer, 1995). In this case, the speaker would be compelled to mention recognisable events, which led to the acquisition of a sexual identity, in order for her story to be considered legitimate and coherent.

Gergen’s (1994) third point is that narratives involve an “ordering of events” (p. 191). The prevailing convention still appears to be “that of a linear, temporal sequence” (Gergen, 1994, p. 191). Thus, narratives are commonly structured with a beginning, a middle, and an end, which in western society is interpreted as a logical narrative form. The coming out story, for instance, is usually told in a fairly predictable and ordered way. As Plummer (1995) argues, the coming out story is a retrospective tale which the speaker tells by looking back and recounting the “signs” that indicated her sexual identity.

The fourth characteristic is the “stability of identity” that is constructed through the narrative (Gergen, 1994, p. 191). In order to present an intelligible story, any people involved in the narrative need to present a stable and enduring identity over space and time. Gergen explains that a narrative can portray identity change when “the story attempts to explain the change itself” (p. 192). The change of sexuality in a coming out story could exemplify such a narrative, in which the individual speaks about moving from a heterosexual to a homosexual identity. Furthermore, a person’s (homo)sexual identity is constructed as an identity that was there all along, and which needed to be uncovered through the process of coming out. As discussed in chapter two, this understanding of a lesbian’s sexual identity has been supported by coming out theorists.

The fifth point is that narratives are framed by “demarcation signs” (Gergen, 1994, p. 192). Just as a story is structured in temporal ordering, so it needs to be marked at the beginning and the end. These are linguistic phrases that are familiar in a certain society, which help to orient the listener or reader in the beginning and termination of the story. A person’s coming out story could, for example, begin when the narrator says, “I first started to think I might be lesbian when...” and end with a description of the narrator’s current (homo)sexual identity as the endpoint.

Unlike interpretative repertoires, narratives offer a framework in which people can construct their identities. This is afforded by the establishment of a final outcome, the ordering of events and their link to the valued endpoint. Narratives therefore provide structure for identity work through the element of time. In addition, narratives can be understood as cultural products, in that they are made up of socially familiar ways of narrating one’s life (Bruner, 1987; Gergen, 1994).

The above description of narrative form is not an attempt to put forward a formulaic pattern of storytelling. Instead, the intention is to highlight the fact that this is the current western conception of well-structured narratives. The coming out story, in particular, exemplifies how a narrative is structured according to western understandings of what constitutes a “logical” narration of one’s sexual identity. Gergen’s (1994) explanation of the construction of narratives is useful, in that it highlights how narratives are shaped by socio-historical conditions, and, therefore, are always open to change.

4.2.3. Contextual influences on narrative construction

Narratives can be understood not only as socially constructed, but also as “discursive actions”, because “they derive their significance from the way in which they are employed within relationships” (Gergen & Gergen, 2006, p. 118). Thus, narratives are co-constructions between the narrator and the audience (listener or reader) (Andrews et al., 2004). McCormack (2004) argues similarly that the autobiographical background of the listener and the speaker, in addition to the “interactional aspects of the relationship”, play a role in how a narrative is shaped (p. 226). Narratives are not only produced and constrained within a particular cultural milieu, they are also shaped by the people involved in the specific telling. Hence, the speakers’ personal characteristics and previous experiences could play a role in what stories are told, how narratives are constructed, and the meaning that is attached to them.

Given that narratives are shaped by myriad social and interpersonal elements, it is not difficult to imagine that they can change in their re-tellings. Mary Gergen (2004) describes them as “malleable and multifaceted” (p. 274), which highlights their flexibility and constructed nature. Moreover, Davies and Harré (1999) explain that, because narratives are “located within a number of different discourses”, they “vary dramatically in terms of language used, the concepts, issues, and moral judgements made relevant, and the subject positions made available within them” (p. 35). Narratives therefore are open to reconstruction, depending on contextual and discursive conditions.

4.3. Narratives as resources for identity work

Theorists oriented in the storied resource perspective, as I discussed earlier, take a very different view of identity compared to psychosocial theorists. Theorists such as Taylor and Littleton (2006) are specifically interested in how biographical talk is constituted, and how a speaker’s identity is discursively produced and constrained through narratives.

Within the narrative-discursive perspective, identities are thought to be entities that are reproduced in talk and, owing to the socio-cultural influences on narratives, identities are shaped by immediate and wider contexts, which determine what types of speech and action are possible (Taylor, 2005a). A person’s identity can alter slightly in different social interactions, depending on who is present, and the cultural, historical or geographical setting in which the narrative is produced. Thus,

identity is understood from the narrative-discursive perspective as a social product (Smith & Sparkes, 2008).

Given that “talk is the ‘site’ of identity work” (Taylor, 2005a, p. 47), this section shall first address how narratives aid and constrain a speaker’s identity work. Narratives provide subject positions, which speakers can either accept, negotiate, or refuse, and these positions facilitate a speaker’s identity construction (Taylor, 2005a). Secondly, following Taylor (2005a), I shall argue that identity coherence is something that is achieved through the rehearsal and repetition of narratives, and is not pre-determined outside of language. Following this, I shall explain how speakers face moments of “trouble in [their] identity work” (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 26), when they appear to occupy contradictory or undesirable positions. Finally, I shall address how speakers can negotiate troubled positions through rhetorical work (Bamberg, 2004a).

4.3.1. Subject positions

Reynolds et al. (2007) approach narratives as instances in which speakers’ identities are constructed through available subject positions. Subject positions can be understood as multiple “‘locations’ within a conversation” (Edley, 2001, p. 210) or specifically, “different identities that are made available by different ways of talking” (Reynolds et al., 2007, p. 336). The particular discursive resources that shape a narrative will influence what subject positions are present, and, if taken up, how speakers talk about themselves, objects, and/or events in the world (Davies & Harré, 1999; Edley, 2001; Taylor, 2006). A speaker’s identity is, therefore, discursively constructed and contingent upon the various subject positions that open up within narrative spaces.

Wetherell (1998) believes that subject positions should not be viewed as entirely determined by prevailing discourses, but should be considered for the ways in which speakers utilise positions within a social episode. Taylor and Littleton (2006) draw on Wetherell (1998) when they explain that speakers are involved in an interactive process of positioning. In other words, a speaker can be positioned by others, but she also has the agency to accept or deny these subject positions (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). A subject position is thus “a temporary identity which is conferred on or taken up by a speaker and which becomes both who she or he is seen to be, by others, and the perspective from which she or he sees the world” (Taylor, 2006, p. 96).

4.3.2. Identity coherence

Given the western conception of coherent narratives, speakers are also expected to remain consistent in the way that they present themselves and how they construct their narratives. Taylor (2003, 2005a), however, argues that the apparent coherence of a speaker's identity is not pre-determined by a unitary, internal nature. Rather, it is accomplished through a reflexive, on-going process of identity work.

One aspect of identity work requires a speaker to maintain a degree of coherence in the positions that she takes up over a series of narrative or social episodes (Taylor, 2005a). The subject positions a speaker claimed in previous narratives or conversations will have an effect on how she can position herself in the current interaction (Taylor, 2005a). In Taylor's (2005a) words, "speakers are already positioned at the outset of any occasion of talk" (p. 48). Hence, there is "an onus [placed] on a speaker to be consistent in [her] identity work" (Taylor, 2005a, p. 47), in the presentation of her narrative and identity, so as to appear credible to others (Taylor, 2003).

A person's identity can take on the appearance of stability and unity through the "rehearsed and repetitive patterns of identity work people do, [and] the narrative resources that people cumulatively use" (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 17). Taylor (2005a, 2006) focuses specifically on this. She explores the ways in which identities are discursively constructed, and how "coherence and continuity in a life narrative are not given" but achieved through talk (Taylor, 2006, p. 98).

A narrative, as understood from the narrative-discursive approach, is a version or instance of on-going identity work (Taylor, 2005a; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Therefore, a person is seen to engage in "rehearsed identity work" and is continually involved in an "extended process through which identities are constructed and taken up" (Taylor, 2005a, p. 48). Throughout her lifetime, a person will repetitively tell her personal narrative to others, in varying interpersonal and social contexts. When a person re-tells her story to someone else it is not entirely new; rather, it is "a version [that] must be reworked on each new occasion to accommodate new concerns and situations", but is still influenced by the pressure to remain coherent (Taylor, 2003, p. 197).

Previous narrative tellings thus provide "resources for future talk" (Taylor, 2006, p. 98). The positionings in prior versions of a person's narrative can, for example, facilitate identity work by

creating a sense of “continuity across occasions of talk and a likelihood that patterns will be repeated” (Taylor, 2005a, p. 48). Taylor (2005a) believes that it is because of this continual re-establishment of a personal narrative that a person appears to invest in particular subject positions, and, therefore, is seen to maintain a coherent identity.

A certain obligation is placed on the individual speaker to maintain a sense of consistency in her identity work, given the social constraints that shape narratives and identity construction (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Smith and Sparkes (2008) point out that “self-coherence and stability” of identity is “something people artfully *do*” (p. 17, emphasis in original). Therefore, the idea of a coherent self is a socio-cultural artefact, which is not achieved through a cognitive process, but produced *discursively* through social episodes.

Speakers do not, however, always take up subject positions that are consistent, or that agree with each other, because “identities are multiple and complex” (Taylor, 2005a, p. 48). Furthermore, as Davies and Harré (1999) explain, “the experiencing of contradictory positions as problematic, as something to be reconciled or remedied, stems from this general feature of the way being a person is *done* in our [western] society” (p. 37, emphasis in original). These instances require some degree of rhetorical work, as shall be discussed in the following two sub-sections.

4.3.3. Identity trouble

Davies and Harré (1999) argue that people do not always develop understandings of themselves that make up a “unified coherent whole” (p. 49). Instead, speakers can “shift from one to another way of thinking about themselves as the discourse shifts and as their positions within varying storylines are taken up” (Davies & Harré, 1999, p. 49). The numerous subject positions that are available within narratives may at times work against a speaker’s attempts at coherence. If a speaker adopts subject positions that disagree with each other, or differ from a previous identity position in one narrative telling, then her identity work is “troubled” (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 27). Given that speakers are required to present a degree of consistency in how they speak and present themselves, any identity trouble needs to be “remedied, transcended, resolved or [even] ignored” (Davies & Harré, 1999, p. 49).

Identity trouble is discussed by Wetherell (1998) and taken up by Taylor (2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2006), Taylor and Littleton (2006), and Reynolds et al. (2007), who are all interested in how speakers are both enabled and restricted by discursive resources. As Taylor and Littleton (2006) point out, it would be incorrect to assume that “talk is infinitely flexible and speakers can construct or claim any identity they want” (p. 32). There are three ways in which identities can be troubled, either by discursive resources (Taylor & Littleton, 2006), by undesirable positions (Reynolds et al., 2007), or through a speaker’s positioning over the course of her biographical talk (both in the immediate context and over an extended period of time) (Taylor, 2005a).

First of all, as outlined earlier, there are certain discursive resources, such as interpretative repertoires or canonical narratives, which offer a speaker various subject positions. A speaker’s characteristics or subject positions (e.g., gender, sexuality, profession) will influence what she can (or cannot) say, or what narratives are accessible to her. However, these positions can be challenging to resolve, as facets of a person’s identity do not always fit together easily (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). For example, a person’s religion may trouble her sexual identity in particular moments. Similarly, a “black” woman in South Africa might find herself in spaces, in which her racial identity troubles her sexual identity. In this case, she may be compelled not to make her sexual identity known to others, in order to be considered a part of her community.

The second point is that a speaker can, at times, take up a subject position which could be negatively valued (Reynolds et al., 2007). This would pose trouble for the speaker in that it places her in an undesirable and possibly disempowering position. For example, if a lesbian were to tell a story in which she had sexual experiences with both men and women, her sexuality might be constructed as changeable, and questions might be raised by others about the authenticity of her sexuality. With terms such as “heteroflexibility”, “has-bian” and “LUG – lesbian until graduation”, there is clearly a strict policing of who “counts” as a lesbian (Diamond, 2008, p. 1).

Negative positions can be remedied if the speaker takes up an alternative and more valuable position (Reynolds et al., 2007). Otherwise, if the speaker continues to hold this potentially undesirable position, she is required to explain or justify herself (Wetherell, 1998). Hence, lesbians who are seen to have had experiences with men are required to draw on rhetorical

strategies such as explaining these experiences as “in the past”, in order to remedy this identity trouble, and be considered “real” lesbians.

Thirdly, Davies and Harré (1990, as cited in Taylor & Littleton, 2006) speak of the “cumulative fragments of a lived autobiography” (p. 48), which constrain a speaker’s positioning over time. Davies and Harré’s concept is similar to Taylor and Littleton’s (2006) notion of biographical talk, which they understand as something that extends over a person’s lifetime. As previously discussed, a speaker’s identity needs repair when new subject positions appear to contradict each other, or seem inconsistent with positions in an earlier telling (Taylor, 2005a).

Despite the need for coherence, people often “accept that their beliefs about themselves and their environment are full of unresolved contradictions which one just lives with” (Davies & Harré, 1999, p. 49). Some positions are irreconcilable and it is possible to bear some level of inconsistency in one’s identity. Furthermore, this highlights the view held by narrative-discursive theorists that a person’s identity is not as unified as it appears to be. There are, however, moments when “trouble” does need to be negotiated, which shall be discussed below.

4.3.4. Rhetorical work

Speakers are continually involved in a reflexive process of re-constructing and re-negotiating their identities in their identity work. As mentioned earlier, when a speaker’s identity is troubled, she is required to make some effort in restoring a sense of continuity with prior positions. Otherwise, she has to defend or explain new or undesirable subject positions that she occupies within a narrative (Bamberg, 2004a). Speakers are provided with a degree of agency and control over how they present themselves to others, yet there are, evidently, a number of constraints that can be placed upon this agency. Therefore, speakers are simultaneously restrained and facilitated through the discursive conditions in which their identity work is located.

Taylor and Littleton, drawing on Billig (1987, as cited in Taylor & Littleton, 2006), suggest that a person not only talks on the level of the immediate interaction, but talks concurrently on other levels by responding to “imagined or previously experienced audiences and criticisms” (p. 24). Painter and Theron (2001) also note that “the rhetorical... production of meaning in conversations and arguments is overridden by larger and more abstract systems of signification” (p. 3). The

speaker, therefore, is compelled to recognise established ideas and meanings within a context and to “talk against” these through “rhetorical work” (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 24).

Bamberg (2004a) explains that by acknowledging the “rhetorical finessing”, or rhetorical work that speakers do in their narratives, one can see how they “fashion self- and identity-claims” (p. 221). This is evident in talk when “interactional trouble” occurs, as speakers are required to reconstruct their positions so that they are “interactively useful” (Bamberg, 2004a, p. 221). Bamberg points to Goffman’s (1967, as cited in Bamberg, 2004a) theory of “face work” to explain how speakers negotiate the “institutional and interpersonal demands” that can trouble their talk (p. 221). Speakers continually work to claim a “positive social value” in their identity work, but “face [or positive social value] can either be lost or saved” at any time (Goffman, 1967, as cited in Bamberg, 2004a, p. 221).

There are “rhetorical devices” (Bamberg, 2004b, p. 346), or “rhetorical strategies” (Painter & Theron, 2001, p. 3) that speakers can employ to defend claims they make about their identities. The speaker may utilise a rhetorical strategy in order to pre-empt criticism from her audience, or to avoid being positioned in a negative way, and thus “save face” (Bamberg, 2004a). Rhetorical strategies can be understood as “discursive or interactive moves” that are made by the speaker to remedy trouble that occurs in talk, or that could potentially arise in the interaction (Bamberg, 2004b, p. 347). A speaker can, for instance, make a claim about herself, such as “I am a lesbian”, which others might question. In such a case, she would need to use rhetorical strategies in order to explain her position. This can be achieved while drawing on particular interpretative repertoires (such as repertoires around being gay or lesbian), which allow the speaker to construct herself as “really” lesbian, and, thus gain acceptance within the gay and lesbian community.

As Bamberg (2004a) highlights, a speaker’s identity can be troubled both on the micro-level, of everyday interpersonal interaction, and on the institutional- or macro-level. For instance, a speaker might draw on the coming out narrative, which enables her to construct her sexual identity of lesbian as positive, authentic, and enduring. This indicates identity positioning on a macro-level, in that a speaker’s identity is shaped by wider, socially-established ways of understanding lesbian identities. Any identity position that the speaker takes up that does not appear to be congruent with the coming out story would necessitate her engagement in rhetorical work, so as to

repair or defend this incongruence. On an interpersonal (micro) level, a speaker might be challenged by the listener when she appears to take up contradictory positions. For example, the speaker might be questioned about being open about her sexuality in some areas of her life and not in others. Once again, the speaker would need to talk around this identity trouble and try to resolve or explain it.

Owing to heteronormative practices, it is possible that lesbians might at times be required to engage in rhetorical work within their identity construction. For instance, heteronormativity continues to remain a dominant ideology within society, whereby people are categorised into two types: women, who are feminine and desire men, and men, who are masculine and attracted to women. This places obvious constraints on gender and sexuality (Crawley, 2009). The assumption of heterosexuality pervades daily interactions and, as Land and Kitinger (2005) explain, facilitates heterosexual speakers, while causing difficulties for lesbians. When constructing a lesbian identity, a speaker is required to talk against heteronormativity and risk taking up a socially undesirable position. The speaker can effectively challenge heteronormativity by utilising various rhetorical strategies that re-construct her sexual identity as positive. For instance, by drawing on the coming out narrative, the speaker can position herself as part of a community of people who have shared similar experiences, thus resisting being positioned as an outsider. In this way, a lesbian speaker is seen to continually negotiate a troubled position in her narrative of sexual identity. In the following section, I shall further address how identity construction can be analysed on a macro-level, that is, how relations of power and social practices shape the construction of identities.

4.4. Extending the narrative-discursive approach

In their narrative-discursive approach, Taylor and Littleton (2006) envision speakers to be involved in a continual, dynamic process of identity construction. As I have discussed in this chapter, Taylor and Littleton (2006) are concerned with identifying what discursive resources are made available to speakers within certain social contexts, and understanding how these resources shape and constrain speakers' identity work. The narrative-discursive approach maintains a central focus on the context of identity construction. Firstly, identity work is the focus of this approach, investigating how identity construction is facilitated and constrained by the interlocutors' interpersonal relations, and how the speaker is expected to remain consistent in the

subject positions that she takes up over time. Secondly, the ways in which speakers can narrate their lives, and, thus, construct their identities, is understood from this perspective to be shaped by socially relevant ways of speaking and narrating, namely, interpretative repertoires or canonical narratives. These are collectively referred to as discursive resources.

While the analysis of discursive resources is important for understanding identity construction, it is additionally necessary to consider how speakers' identities are constituted through relations of power and social practices. Although the notion of power is implied to some extent in their work, Taylor and Littleton (2006) do not explicitly address the dimension of power in the process of identity construction. I suggest that a more fine-grained analysis, which considers precisely how social and discursive practices shape identity construction, can be achieved by applying Foucauldian thought to a narrative-discursive approach. Therefore, in this thesis I aim to show not only how discursive resources shape and constrain lesbians' identities, but, additionally, how lesbians are enmeshed in a network of power relations and *how* their identities are constructed through this network.

There are particular aspects of Foucault's (1978/1990) analytics of power that can be employed to understand the construction of sexuality, which keep both the social and discursive context of identity construction central to the analysis. In this section, I shall firstly address Foucault's (1978/1990) understanding of power, including its relationship to truth and knowledge. I shall then go on to discuss the concept of "disciplinary power" (Foucault, 1977) and its relevance for lesbian identity construction. I shall show, in particular, how Foucault's (1978/1990) idea of "confession" works as a technology of disciplinary power, and how certain norms govern the process of lesbian identity construction, so that lesbians regulate disclosures related to their sexual identities and their behaviour within a web of heteronormative power relations.

4.4.1. Foucauldian analytics of power

Foucault (1980a) argues against the "judicial" notion of power as sovereign and repressive and dismisses this notion as "inadequate" (p. 183). Instead, he engages in an "analytics of power", whereby he theorises power as both a repressive and productive force. This is evident in his analysis of sexuality in the 18th and 19th centuries (Foucault, 1978/1990, 1980a). Foucault (1980a) argues that sexuality was not only restricted by society in the Victorian era, but was subjected to

“quite precise and positive instruments... [which] fabricated sexuality” (p. 185). Power can operate in both constructive and restrictive ways.

Power is not “something that is acquired, seized, or shared” (Foucault, 1978/1990, p. 94). As Foucault (1980b) maintains:

Power must be analysed as something which circulates... it is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands... Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power (p. 98).

Accordingly, he states that power is not held by one person “who possesses or exercises it by right of birth; [but rather] it becomes a machinery that no one owns” (Foucault, 1980c, p. 156). Therefore, no single person can “have” power; it is not sovereign. Rather, it circulates through relations and operates through discourses (Foucault, 1978/1990).

Discourses, Foucault (1978/1990) asserts, link power and knowledge. Foucault (1978/1990) interrogates what knowledge is formed through the link between power and discourse, and asserts that power should be analysed by identifying particular “discourses [that] it permeates”, which enable relations of power to affect human behaviour and subjectification (p. 11). Thus, from a Foucauldian perspective, knowledge is not merely true or false, but is linked to systems of power that determine what knowledge supersedes other forms of knowledge (Macleod, 1999; McNay, 1994).

In his analytics of power, Foucault focuses on what he terms the “power/knowledge nexus”, which means that knowledge is never neutral, but that it is rather “a product of power relations and also instrumental in sustaining these relations” (McNay, 1994, p. 27). He argues that “[t]he object... is to define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality” (Foucault, 1978/1990, p. 11). For example, knowledge about the lesbian subject has slowly changed in African culture, owing to shifts in social, political and historical frameworks. The concept of a lesbian identity has shifted, accordingly, from one that was non-existent, whereby no link was made between homosexual behaviour and a homosexual identity, to lesbianism (and homosexuality in general) being constructed as “un-African” (Cock, 2003). Similarly, Foucault (1978/1990) shows how new knowledge was created around sexuality between the 18th and 19th centuries, which resulted in boundaries being placed upon what was sayable, and what forms of sexuality were acceptable.

4.4.2. Disciplinary power

There are certain “technologies of power” which, Foucault (1988) explains, “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivising of the subject” (as cited in Tamboukou, 2008, p. 107). This means that particular forms of knowledge, which gain importance over others, work to produce the individual subject by determining what are acceptable ways of speaking and behaving. As I shall explain below, individuals are required to constantly engage in self-surveillance, which leads them to conform to certain norms. This can be understood as a process of normalisation.

Individuals, according to Foucault (1977), are no longer disciplined through repressive practices of punishment, but are subjected instead to a normalising judgement or “gaze” (p. 184). Hence, norms are “internalised” by individuals, who learn to regulate their speech and behaviour accordingly. Foucault (1977) terms this “disciplinary power” (p. 182). McNay (1994) clarifies Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power further:

Individuals are controlled through the power of the norm and this power is effective because it is relatively invisible. In modern society, the behaviour of individuals is regulated not through overt repression but through a set of standards and values associated with normality which are set into play by a network of ostensibly beneficent and scientific forms of knowledge. It is this notion of disciplinary power as a normalising rather than repressive force that lies at the base of Foucault’s assertion that power is a positive phenomenon (pp. 94-95).

Individuals have become inscribed in a “regime of visibility” (Wilbraham, 1997, p. 66). This means that people’s lives and actions have been made visible to others, and are open to judgement. Thus, people’s lives have become open to interpretation and examination, and are “reformable through the normalising scrutiny of experts” (Rose, 1990, as cited in Wilbraham, 1997, pp. 66-67). The constant possibility that one might be observed and judged has led individuals to self-regulate. For instance, through the process of “psychologisation”, the individual’s self, body and relationships are constantly subjected to “expert” knowledges and psychological practices (Rose, 1990, as cited in Wilbraham, 1997, p. 67). Therefore, people learn to regulate how they view themselves and their relationships with others, according to norms which are conveyed through psychology (Wilbraham, 1997).

Heteronormativity, or heterosexism, is an ideology which is entrenched through disciplinary power. Land and Kitinger (2005) define heterosexism as the “privileging of heterosexuality as

the only ‘normal’, ‘natural’, and taken-for-granted sexuality” (p. 371). Heterosexuality has become normalised through a set of standards and values, which have been consistently supported by institutions (such as religion, medicine, psychology, etc.) that have been constructed as purveyors of the truth. As Foucault (1978/1990) illustrates, the privileging of heterosexuality, particularly from the Victorian era onwards, was only possible through the creation of an aberrant “other”, namely, homosexuality. For example, sex was constructed as acceptable if it worked in the favour of reproduction (i.e., heterosexual monogamy), while that which did not was deemed abnormal or deviant, namely, homosexuality (Foucault, 1978/1990). Foucault (1978/1990) believes that the lack of attention that was paid to heterosexuality by medical, legal, and psychological institutions is indicative of its uncontested normative status.

Given that institutions such as medicine and psychology inform everyday life and behaviour, individuals (both heterosexual and homosexual) are subtly compelled to regulate themselves and to conform to the heterosexual norm. This has the effect of reinforcing heteronormative relations of power. Heteronormativity can be reproduced on an institutional (macro) level, for example in the form of social policies that deny homosexual relationships. In addition, this can occur on an interpersonal (micro) level, in everyday mundane interactions, for instance, a person’s assumption (albeit “innocent”) that another person’s partner is the “opposite” sex (Kitzinger, 2005; Land & Kitzinger, 2005). In this project, the latter, micro-political, element is made explicit by a narrative-discursive analysis, while the incorporation of a Foucauldian lens brings the macro-dimension of power to attention.

Heteronormativity can be further reproduced through the technology of power, which Foucault (1978/1990) terms “confession”. As I shall explain in the following sub-section, the “truth” of one’s (homo)sexuality has been constructed as something which must be revealed to another person, who is usually in a position of authority. The individual is promised that in doing so, she will come to know herself more deeply (Foucault, 1978/1990). As I shall explain, the confession of one’s sexual identity has been necessitated by heteronormativity, as lesbians (and gay men) are compelled to continually disclose their “abnormal” identity, and regulate their behaviour in relation to the heterosexual norm.

4.4.3. Confession

From a Foucauldian perspective, modern society is epitomised by a “will to truth”, or perpetual endeavour for the truth, which has established a dichotomy of “truth and falsehood” (McNay, 1994, p. 86; Smart, 1985). Foucault (1978/1990) explains that people have learnt to reveal the truth of their “most secret nature”, while any obstacle in telling the truth is deemed a result of an oppressive power (p. 60). The practice of confession, according to Foucault (1978/1990), “became one of the West’s most highly valued techniques for producing truth” (p. 59). What began as a religious practice of people submitting themselves to confess the truth to priests and religious leaders was transformed into a practice that would elicit the truth of sex (Foucault, 1978/1990). Smart (1985) draws on Foucault’s (1978/1990) theory, and points out that, “[i]n the confession, truth and sex have been joined, and from it has evolved a knowledge of the subject” (p. 98).

During the 18th and 19th centuries, confession was transformed from a religious act into a psychological imperative (Foucault, 1978/1990). In this way, sexuality was redefined in terms of the dichotomy of normal/pathological, instead of the prior binary of moral/sinful (Foucault, 1978/1990). The confession of one’s “abnormal” thoughts, behaviour and desire was, according to Foucault (1978/1990), elicited with the promise that “the truth healed” (p. 67). Thus, people have come to believe that one is not free until the “truth” has been confessed, that it “‘demands’ only to surface” (p. 60).

Foucault (1978/1990) points out, however, that the “obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us” (p. 60). For this, confession can be viewed as a technology of power.

Foucault (1978/1990) describes the nature and operation of confession as follows:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him [sic]; it unburdens him of his [sic] wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation (pp. 61-62).

Foucault (1978/1990) describes confession as a “ritual of discourse”. The disclosure of one’s sexuality is certainly acknowledged by gay and lesbian theorists, particularly those of whom work in the field of narrative, as a ritualistic act that encourages feelings of solidarity in the lesbian and gay community (e.g., Bacon, 1998; Cohler & Hammack, 2006). Disclosing the truth of one’s sexuality has, in fact, become an inextricable part of claiming a lesbian or gay identity, which involves differentiating oneself from the heterosexual norm (Bacon, 1998; Cass, 1979; Harry, 1993). As Burman et al. (1997) explain, confession has specifically been reproduced through a “network of psychological discourses” which compels individuals to “look deep within to find a truth” (p. 2).

Foucault (1978/1990) points out that the person who confesses is not only the speaker, but is simultaneously positioned as the “subject of the statement”, and thus is placed under scrutiny or observation. The confession does not occur in isolation; rather, it involves a person revealing the truth to a listener (either real/imagined; present/removed), who is expected to react in some way. The listener is either placed in a position of authority, such as a psychologist, or is someone who is assumed to react in a positive or supportive way (e.g., “to console”). The confession, therefore, always takes place in a power relationship.

Following Foucault (1978/1990), the individual who confesses is promised some degree of “modification”. Telling the truth of one’s inner self is constructed as a freeing experience and one which will produce a greater sense of self-awareness (Foucault, 1978/1990). The individual, therefore, chooses to reveal the secret of her inner being in order to become better acquainted with herself and thus attain self-actualisation. This search for one’s inner truth has been promoted by psychology (Burman et al., 1997). Firstly, therapeutic sessions can be viewed as spaces in which the individual is encouraged to confess her inner feelings, sense of self, or problems, which the psychologist can then help to modify or “fix”. Secondly, techniques of popular psychology (such as self-help books) encourage people to discover their inner selves and ultimately achieve a sense of well-being. This stance has been exemplified, furthermore, in the models of coming out theorists (such as Cass, 1979). For instance, coming out models have constructed the disclosure of one’s sexual identity as a way in which gay men and lesbians can achieve congruency between their public and private identities, and that this will result in their experiencing feelings of relief.

Although the practice of confession has been constructed as beneficial and positive for an individual to engage in, it is also important to recognise the way in which it restricts her. In other words, the confession of one's (homo)sexual identity initially stemmed from the binary that was created during the Victorian era between "normal" (i.e., heterosexual) and "abnormal" (i.e., homosexual) sexualities. Since then, a homosexual identity has been constructed as something that needs to be confessed to others. Given the way in which confession has been constructed as an important and necessary way of accepting the "truth", the restrictive effects of this practice have been obscured. Hence, this practice reproduces heterosexuality as the norm according to which gay men and lesbians must regulate themselves (e.g., accepting their "abnormal" status).

The disclosure of one's (homo)sexual identity cannot always be understood as a moment of confession, as a person can disclose her sexuality for a number of different reasons and within varying conditions. There are, however, instances when a lesbian's disclosure can be viewed simultaneously as an attempt to reveal her inner being, and, as a practice of self-regulation, which is necessitated by heteronormative ideology. By considering these moments of confession, one can see how a lesbian reproduces broader relations of power on the micro-level of her identity construction. Maintaining a Foucauldian perspective, individuals do not merely reproduce ideology, but have opportunities to contest and modify what has been taken for granted.

4.4.4. Resistance

Foucault (1978/1990) argues that a discourse can both facilitate and hinder power relations, that it can be not only "an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block" (p.101). There are numerous points of resistance, Foucault (1978/1990) believes, which are present in the network of power relations and that this is owing to the multiplicity and instability of discourses. There are, therefore, many opportunities and ways in which resistance can arise. For instance, resistance can take the form of "reverse or subjugated discourses and practices subverting hegemonic discourses and practices" (Macleod & Durrheim, 2002, p. 55). An example of this is a lesbian's disclosure of her sexuality to her friends during a conversation around intimate relationships, which challenges the assumption that everyone is heterosexual. This indicates a resistance of hegemonic ideology on the micro-level of everyday interaction.

Resistance is not, however, merely a reaction to “basic domination” (since there is no one, great source of repression) and, therefore, does not take on a unified form (Foucault, 1978/1990, p. 95). Instead, as Foucault (1978/1990) explains, resistance is “spread over time and place at varying densities”: at times it effectively mobilises groups, but rarely causes “great radical ruptures” (p. 96). This acknowledgement of resistance is vital in that unlike the judicial notion of power (as entirely repressive), resistance is viewed as inseparable from freedom (Macleod & Durrheim, 2002). A lesbian might, for instance, tell her “coming out story” to counter heteronormativity. Although it offers some resistance to the hegemonic discourse of heterosexuality, the very articulation of “coming out” can, however, entrench the othered status of homosexuality.

When Foucauldian thought is incorporated with the narrative-discursive approach, lesbians’ stories of sexual identity can be analysed for the ways in which they are shaped by discursive resources, and how lesbians’ identity construction is located within a network of power relations. By taking this approach, prevailing discursive and social practices can be analysed for how they shape and constrain a lesbian’s sexual identity within a specific socio-historical context. Furthermore, this perspective enables a consideration of how lesbians negotiate their sexual identities while inscribed in a web of power relations that serve to entrench heterosexuality.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter involved a discussion of how theorists oriented in the storied resource perspective apply discursive theory to the analysis of narratives. Specifically, Taylor and Littleton’s (2006) narrative-discursive approach was explained for how it incorporates an analysis of narratives using discursive methods. The way in which narratives, and identity, are conceptualised within the narrative-discursive approach was highlighted as quite distinct from that of other narrative perspectives, such as the psychosocial approach. Narratives are understood within the narrative-discursive orientation as constituted by particular discursive resources. Hence, narratives are social products because they are shaped by, and made up of, socially relevant ways of speaking and narrating events and experiences. Narratives are also understood as resources for a speaker’s identity work. In her biographical talk, a speaker is able to draw on available subject positions, which she can use to construct her identity. Speakers’ identities can appear to be coherent when they regularly take up the same subject positions in talk. Narratives do, however, both facilitate and constrain speakers’ identity work, which means that speakers are continually involved in a

process of negotiating their identities within discursive conditions. Apart from the discursive resources that shape identities, it is important to examine how identities are constituted through relations of power, which can be done by incorporating Foucauldian thought with the narrative-discursive approach. By considering Foucault's analytics of power, people, and, in this case, lesbians, can be viewed as always subject to certain normalising practices, such as confession. The practice of confession constructs lesbians in particular ways and compels them to continually regulate their sexual identities and behaviour according to prevailing norms (i.e., heterosexuality). Such a combined approach is useful for this project, as it facilitates an analysis of lesbians' identity construction and locates lesbians' negotiation of sexuality within a specific framework of power relations. In the following chapter, I shall address the methodological steps taken in this study to analyse lesbians' stories of sexual identity within the context of a historically white university.

CHAPTER FIVE

METHODOLOGY

The ontological and epistemological assumptions that undergird this project, which were addressed in chapter four, inform the methodological choices that were made for this study. This chapter opens with an outline of the narrative-discursive approach and its incorporation with Foucault's (1978/1990) analytics of power. The research questions, which are then discussed, can be located and understood from this perspective. The third section includes a description of the sampling strategies that were used, the participants' characteristics, and their social context. The method of data collection, namely interviewing, is discussed in the fourth section, which leads to an explanation of the narrative-discursive analytic method of Taylor and Littleton (2006). This research is based on a sensitive and highly personal topic. Therefore, a discussion of the ethical considerations of this project is provided in the fifth section. Lastly, this chapter closes with an account of how reflexivity, transparency and transferability are achieved (Kelly, 2006a), in order to maintain rigour in the research process.

5.1. Theoretical orientation

This project is closely aligned with the theoretical tenets of the discursive approach to narrative, as exemplified in the work of Taylor (2003, 2005a, 2006), Reynolds et al. (2007) and Taylor and Littleton (2006), which were discussed in the previous chapter. The central focus, from this perspective, is on people's identity work, which is considered to be an "ongoing, interactive process through which identities are taken up" (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 22).

Narratives are discursive constructions that are "produced... through a speaker's reflexive work" and are shaped by discursive resources, such as interpretative repertoires and canonical narratives, which are made available within a particular discursive and social context (Taylor, 2003, p. 194). Thus, narratives are not merely products of individual will and action. Instead, they are structured around salient ways of speaking and narrating in a certain cultural and historical location (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). A speaker's narrative is also influenced by the interpersonal and social aspects of the narrative telling, as "a story can be worked up differently according to the construction of the conversation" (Reynolds et al., 2007, p. 335).

Narratives are additionally understood from the narrative-discursive orientation as resources for speakers' identity work (Taylor, 2006). Various subject positions are offered through narratives, which speakers reflexively negotiate in their talk, by either taking up or resisting them (Reynolds et al., 2007). As a person tells her story, so she continually renegotiates and reconstructs her identity. These positions can prove to be a source of constraint, whereby speakers are expected to remain relatively consistent in the positions that they adopt over time, or in one social episode, in order to be considered legitimate speakers (Taylor, 2005b; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Furthermore, subject positions can often be perceived as undesirable or contradictory, and can "trouble" a speaker's identity work (Taylor, 2005b, p. 97). The onus to actively work on repairing her identity, which can be achieved through rhetorical work, is placed, therefore, on the speaker (Bamberg, 2004b; Taylor & Littleton, 2006).

Taylor and Littleton (2006) suggest that, instead of focusing on the subject positions that are made available in each turn of one conversation, as some discursive psychologists suggest (e.g., Wetherell, 1998), more attention should be paid to a person's biography, which is shaped over time. In this way, biographical talk (across one and/or several instances) becomes the site of analysis, for the ways in which identity is constituted within discursive conditions. By applying Taylor and Littleton's (2006) analytic approach, this project involves an analysis of how discursive resources aid lesbians' identity work on the micro-level of everyday interaction and narration.

Taylor and Littleton's (2006) narrative-discursive method shall be incorporated with certain aspects of Foucault's (1978/1990) analytics of power, with the aim of understanding how lesbians' identities are constructed, on a macro-level, within prevailing relations of power. This shall involve an exploration of how lesbians negotiate their identities within various contexts of their lives: namely, within specific geographical and social locations in South Africa, and within the context of a historically white university. By including an analysis of power, I shall show how lesbians reproduce and/or, at times, challenge relations of power (such as heteronormativity) in their stories of sexual identity.

The theoretical tenets that make up Taylor and Littleton's (2006) narrative-discursive approach, as well as Foucault's (1978/1990) analytics of power informed the questions that were posed in this project. The focus of this project was not on analysing the formal structure of narratives, but,

rather, on how lesbians' sexual identities are products of a dynamic and on-going process of reconstruction, which takes place within specific discursive and socio-historical conditions.

5.2. Research questions

The questions used to shape the analysis were aimed at considering how lesbians at a historically white South African university construct their sexual identities. The aim was to explore both how identity construction is discursively shaped, and how lesbians negotiate their sexual identities while located within various networks of power. I, therefore, posed the following questions, which facilitated both the interviewing process and the data analysis.

1. How do lesbians narrate their sexual identities in the context of a historically white university in South Africa?
2. What subject positions do these women take up and/or reject in their talk?
3. Are there any instances when positioning is troubled and how is this negotiated?
4. How do power relations (implicit in confession, heteronormativity and/or the process of normalisation) interweave in lesbians' construction of their identities?
5. How do lesbians negotiate their sexual identities and the (non)disclosure of these identities, given the contexts in which they find themselves?

It is first necessary to consider how the lesbians in this study narrate their sexual identities. This can be done by identifying the particular discursive resources that the speakers draw on: namely, the canonical (and/or alternative) narratives and/or interpretative repertoires which speakers utilise in their talk. How lesbians narrate their sexual identities, furthermore, is dependent upon the context in which they speak, and what discursive resources are made available within that context. In this case, the context of a historically white university, which is undergoing a process of transformation, shall be explored in relation to lesbians' identity construction.

The second question turns the focus to speakers' agency in their identity construction. While discursive resources provide numerous subject positions, these can either be taken up, repaired or rejected through rhetorical work. Particular subject positions, as well as previous positions, can facilitate the production of a lesbian's sexual identity, while on other occasions (both within the same and different narrative tellings) they can hinder or complicate identification. The speaker is,

therefore, constantly engaged in a process of adopting or eschewing multiple positions while constructing her sexual identity.

Thirdly, a speaker sometimes faces “trouble” in her identity work, which requires her to reflexively renegotiate her narrative account, in order to avoid an undesirable position, or to remain consistent with previous identity work. Depending on the relations of power that shape the context in which she finds herself, the speaker will have opportunities either to claim or resist subject positions. Thus, a consideration for how a speaker negotiates identity trouble includes a further analysis of her agency.

In the fourth question, a Foucauldian lens is applied to identity construction. As discussed earlier, according to a Foucauldian perspective, relations of power permeate everyday life, and individuals’ identities are constituted through power. In addition, socially acceptable ways of speaking and behaving (and of constructing the self) are transmitted and sustained through technologies of power (e.g., confession), and taken up by individuals within the context of their everyday micro-political interactions. This question, therefore, addresses how power relations circulate in lesbians’ ongoing identity construction and how they maintain, contest, or transform constructions of lesbian subjectivity in their talk.

By keeping the previous questions in mind, the final question is central in understanding how the context, discursive resources and available subject positions construct a lesbian’s account of her sexual identity. Positioning is always imbued with power. This means that the particular subject positions negotiated by lesbians regulate or delimit the ways that they are able to speak and act. This productive/restrictive aspect of power is considered in the on-going process of lesbians’ identity work, and how it manifests in lesbians’ (non)disclosure (either verbal or non-verbal) of their sexual identities.

5.3. Participants

5.3.1. Sampling

Several sampling strategies were used to select the participants for the study. I initially provided potential participants with information on the project (Appendix 1), using two of the university’s e-mail lists: one that reaches the entire student body, and the other, which is sent to members of

the LGB student society (OUTRhodes). These were sent for approval to the Office of the Dean of Students before they were sent out. The reason for contacting people in this way was so that students who might not necessarily be members of the LGB society would still have the opportunity to participate. Those women who were interested in taking part in the project were requested to complete a questionnaire (Appendix 2), which was provided as an attachment to the e-mail. This required potential participants to provide demographic information and to answer a few questions on the extent to which they were prepared to participate, as well as why they were willing to take part in such a study. This document also provided further information about the project and its parameters and a return date was specified in order to limit the response time.

The sampling was based both on “convenience”, or the participants’ willingness to be involved in the study (Kelly, 2006b, p. 288), as well as judgemental sampling, as the participants were chosen for displaying characteristics that would lead to rich and varied accounts. According to Kelly (2006b), these characteristics include “personal experience of what is being researched, good communicative skills... openness and undefensiveness, and interest in participating, as well as the perception that it may, in some way, be of value to participate” (p. 293). These factors were kept in mind when considering the potential participants’ answers in the questionnaires. For example, one participant commented that: “The study sounds interesting and I would like to be involved in any way I can. It will also give me an opportunity to be a little self-reflexive”.

Projects that entail narrative methods commonly employ a small sample size, because each narrative can produce a rich description (Chase, 2005). Another reason for the small sample size was the fact that the research questions in this project were varied and in-depth, and, therefore, more suited to a small group of participants. The sample for this study included eight participants, as the focus was on presenting a few women’s detailed accounts of their sexuality. Potential participants were kept on a contact list, in order to be available for interviews, until I felt that data collection had reached saturation. This meant that new participants were interviewed until the same themes began to arise in different interviews, which signalled that the topic had been covered sufficiently, or had reached “saturation” (Kelly, 2006a, p. 372).

After being requested to take part in the study, each participant was then required to sign a consent form in the first interview (Appendix 3). This provided information on the participants’ rights and

the extent of their involvement. This also informed them that the interviews would be tape-recorded and transcribed both by myself and an assistant, who signed a confidentiality form. A pseudonym of the participants' choice was additionally used to protect their identity.

5.3.2. Participant characteristics

Morris (1997) notes that “lesbians... are not a homogenous group” (p. 17), and, therefore, cannot all be represented by one or two characteristics. Thus, it was my responsibility to select the participants with the aim of obtaining a variation of people, based on their race, language, nationality and the degree in which they were enrolled. It was acknowledged in the questionnaire that the term “race” is problematic, in that it assumes an essential category of difference. The only reason for the term’s inclusion was that it is still used in the context of South Africa. Nevertheless, as Seedat and MacKenzie (2008) emphasise, “the use of apartheid-generated terminology does not imply an acceptance of the ontological and ideological implications thereof” (p. 88), and it was by no means the definitive criterion for inclusion. The demographic characteristics of the participants, and their involvement in OUTRhodes, are presented in the table below (Table 2). However, for the purposes of protecting the participants’ identities, the participants’ pseudonyms will not be listed along with their characteristics.

Table 2

Participant	Age	Year of Study	Race	Faculty	Active in OUTRhodes
1	20	3 rd year	white	commerce	yes
2	18	1 st year	white	science	no
3	25	Master’s	Indian/white ⁸	arts	yes
4	23	Master’s	white	arts	yes
5	40	PhD	white	science	no
6	19	1 st year	black	commerce	no
7	24	Honours	black	arts	no
8	19	2 nd year	black	commerce	yes

Lesbians have often been ignored in psychological studies on sexuality, which have historically been grounded in the experiences of white men (Kitzinger & Coyle, 2002). Rust (1993) believes that lesbians are often spoken of as an “invisible, and stigmatised population”, which is still

⁸ This particular participant rejected being labelled Indian in her interview, citing her mixed heritage as the reason. Notably, only one white participant troubled her racial identity.

undocumented (p. 55). While this may not be entirely true over a decade later, it is vital that lesbians' accounts of identity are studied, as they do not necessarily share commonalities with gay men or bisexual people. In addition, lesbians' experiences in South Africa continue to be largely unrecorded and have been marginalised even within the gay community (Berman, 1993). Thus, only female participants who identified as lesbian took part in this study. In addition, they needed to be open about their sexuality, or be "out" to several significant people in their lives, in order for them to be able to reflect on the construction of their identity through disclosure to others.

5.3.3. Context

Regarding the context of this study, participants' ages could vary to some degree, but all of the women were required to be enrolled as students at the university. The sample group was highly specific, as the aim was not to offer generalisations for the experiences of lesbians in other contexts of South Africa. Rather, the rationale for employing a qualitative method is to generate a "richer and more finely nuanced account of human action" (Gergen & Gergen, 2007, p. 466), than a statistical study might afford. The aim was, therefore, to consider the identity construction of these particular lesbians' within the context of a historically white university in post-apartheid South Africa, which continues to form the nexus of political, social and personal struggles.

The setting of a university campus was chosen because, as Floyd and Stein (2002) recognise, many young people start to "come out" when they have gained independence from their parents, having left home, and are, for example, at university. The safety which is granted by the "relative anonymity" of the campus environment (Evans & D'Augelli, 1994, p. 203) helps them to disclose their identity to others, as well as giving them the freedom to initiate relationships with same-sex partners. However, as I discussed in both chapters one and three, university campuses can still operate as sites for heterosexism, and they offer varied levels of support for LGB students. This is particularly evident in the context of Rhodes University, in that there are policies in place to combat violence against students based on their sexual orientation, gender, race and so forth, but rape and physical and verbal abuse continue to pose as problems for LGB students at Rhodes and within the wider context of South Africa.

5.4. Data collection

Taking into account the personal and sensitive nature of this research subject, individual interviews were conducted with each of the participants. The format included two separate interviews, which were both semi-structured. The reason for this was that research theorists often agree that more than one interview is necessary if a sense of trust and rapport is hoped to be developed (Mishler, 1986; Seidman, 1991; Wengraf, 2001). The choice of this format was underscored by the aim to encourage participants to follow their own patterns of storytelling and mention whatever experiences were relevant to them. Additionally, this flexible structure was meant to facilitate a collaborative process between the researcher and the participants.

The interview process was initially formulated according to aspects of Wengraf's (2001) Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method, which involved two unstructured interviews and minimal questions apart from the Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative (or SQUIN). This format was tested in a pilot study with one of the participants, Delilah. The interviews were then modified into a semi-structured format, in order to ensure that they would generate sufficient narrative detail to answer the research questions. The pilot study shall now be described, which shall then lead to a discussion of the problems of the initial format, and the changes that were made.

The interview with Delilah lasted approximately 60 minutes. It began with my posing an initial request: "Please tell me about how you came to see yourself as lesbian, and your experiences while developing this identity". I did clarify, however, that while I refer to the label "lesbian", the participant was not expected to use that label, or any label at all. The initial question was used in order to encourage the participant to narrate her experiences in any order, since narrative structure was not the focus, and in as much detail as she was willing to provide. Before the pilot study, I did not formulate any questions, and those that I asked Delilah were based on her stories and what she was saying. The interview was digitally recorded for the purpose of transcription, but I decided near the beginning of the interview that taking notes would be too distracting. The codes that were used for the transcription of all of the interviews are listed in appendix four.

The second interview was meant to take place a week later. The reason for this was that it would provide time for the participant to reflect upon what was discussed during the first interview,

enabling her to clarify or expand upon topics in the second interview. Similarly, this would allow me to listen to the taped interview and familiarise myself with the participant's story. During this time, I could formulate open-ended questions on points that I felt needed further elucidation or that pertained to my research questions.

After reviewing the first interview, however, I decided not to proceed with the second, as I believed the interview format required some adjustments. It appeared that the problems I had encountered in the first interview were all related to the use of a single question at the beginning, without a semi-structured interview schedule. First of all, I found that, without a number of pre-determined, open-ended questions, it was difficult to spontaneously formulate questions, and at times, this meant that the participant needed to clarify the question. For example, I made a comment and asked the question,

31. A: So it's (.1) and it's interesting that (.2) so at that point you actually still didn't actually (.2) still didn't necessarily (.2) have to (.2) disclose? I mean were you (.2) did you ever find yourself in situations where you had to disclose your sexuality at all?

32. D: At OUTRhodes? At the party?

One can immediately see the pauses in my question, and the confusion Delilah expresses about which context of disclosure I meant. If I had had a number of set questions at hand, then I might have been able to clearly articulate questions, which would have made it easier for her to respond.

Roulston, deMarrais and Lewis (2003) point out that, given the socially constructed nature of interviews, the questions that the researcher poses produce "certain kinds of responses (and not others)" (p. 654). This meant that, because the questions were not always well thought out, some of the answers tended to be quite short, when I could have potentially encouraged deeper reflection. At one point, for example, I made the mistake of asking a close-ended question,

39. A: And (.2) okay so the, the (.2) mostly the friends at um (.1) you'd met since honours (.1) have been really supportive?

40. D: Yes.

This question could have been structured differently, for instance as: "How have the friends you have met since honours have been supportive?". An open-ended question may have encouraged the participant to go into more detail and even lead to further narration. In addition, because I did not have set questions to guide me, I occasionally asked questions which were unrelated to what Delilah had just said. This also meant that I had to spend time concentrating on developing questions which resulted in my not always being fully attentive to what she was saying.

I discovered that the question that I had asked at the beginning of the interview did not appear to be comprehensive enough in terms of answering my research questions. Delilah did not seem to have any difficulty beginning her narrative after I posed the question, which meant that the request was clear and easy to comprehend. However, the question merely required the participant to narrate the experience of “coming out”, and the process of developing a lesbian identity. It did not seem to address the ways in which other parts of Delilah’s identity may have, at times, affected her sexual identity. Delilah did discuss her family and the contexts of her university and home life. However, it seemed these areas could have been explored further. Thus, it became apparent that the one initial question, and the use of an unstructured interview was not entirely effective in producing enough detail to answer the research questions of the study.

For these reasons I decided to modify the interview format, by employing two semi-structured interviews instead. At the beginning of the first interview with each participant, I explained the ethical guidelines, which covered informed consent, confidentiality, and the consequences of participation (see section 5.6 for a discussion of ethics). I then attempted to create a relaxed atmosphere by discussing general topics with the participant, such as the degree she was doing, before asking the initial question as described earlier. In contrast to the pilot study, the interviews were guided by a number of open-ended questions that were categorised in terms of distinct themes: for example, disclosure, experiences both at university and at home, and strategies of (non)disclosure (Appendix 5). These questions were formulated based on the main points of discussion of the second literature review (see chapter three). This meant that I had more control over the direction of the interview. However, the questions provided a degree of guidance for the participant, which was absent in the pilot study.

I tried to approach all of the interviews as a conversation, which I recognised would be co-constructed between myself and the participant (Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). This approach supports the narrative-discursive method of Taylor and Littleton (2006), whereby narratives are understood as products of social interactions. In the first set of interviews, I tried to ask questions that were not too threatening, and I focused on developing rapport with the participant. The questions I posed depended entirely upon how comfortable each participant felt and how willing she was to discuss personal issues. In all of the interviews I asked non-prepared

questions, in order to clarify or to elicit further information about a topic. I often used minimal verbal responses, such as “mm hm” and “okay” to encourage the participant to keep talking. At times I made evaluative comments, such as “That must have been really frustrating”, and occasionally I self-disclosed, but only to show support or to encourage further discussion. For example, one participant, Linda, spoke about feeling “uncomfortable” when she attended some of the OUTRhodes events with her partner, who is a teacher in the community. I then disclosed a similar experience in order to show that I understood how she felt, as shown below.

81. A: Ja (.1) no I understand that because my partner is also (.1) she’s in a profession where (.1) she, she deals with (.1) um (.1) high school children (.1) like she’s a doctor.

82. L: She’s the chiropractor?

83. A: Yes ((laughs))

84. L: I knew. I’ve seen you at the gym. ((laughs))

Apart from encouraging Linda to speak further about what it is like to be out in public with her partner, it was at this point that I felt the distinction between us change; we were no longer a researcher and participant, but also people living in the same community. Collaboration such as this did appear to create a more “natural” feeling, which, at times, made the interview feel like an everyday interaction.

The first interview generally lasted longer than the second interview and varied in length from 60 to 90 minutes. In order to make the participant feel at ease, each participant was given the choice of where the interview would be conducted. In the end, all but two of the participants chose to meet in my office. Similar to the pilot study, each interview was digitally recorded, but process notes were also made occasionally.

Near the end of the first interview, I would begin to conclude the interview by asking the participant if she had anything else to say. Kvale (2007) notes that often at the end of interviews the participant can feel some discomfort after having shared deeply personal experiences, which may lead to questions as to the purposes of the study. For this reason, I asked each participant how she had experienced the interview and whether she had any significant thoughts or feelings about being interviewed or what had been discussed. I also encouraged the participant to ask me any questions, either about the study, or about me, that she wished to ask. Although participants did not always ask questions, this opportunity was provided in order to ensure that they did not

feel they had shared information and had not received anything in return, which frequently occurs in interviews (Kvale, 2007).

Immediately after the first interview, I set aside time to reflect on what had taken place. Wengraf (2001) suggests that this time to de-brief is essential, as it prevents short-term memory loss. This also provides a chance for the researcher to write notes on the personal experience, thoughts, memories or anything else that seems relevant. In this study, a research journal was used for the purposes of self-debriefing, which shall be discussed later as a tool for reflexivity.

Despite the initial plan to conduct the second interview a week later, given the way the university holidays fell, the first set of interviews took place at the end of the second term and the second set were done in the first weeks of the third term. As discussed earlier, this time between the interviews provided ample opportunity for both the participants and myself to reflect on the first interview. It also enabled the participants to remember details and other stories, and for me to formulate further questions. The content of the second interview relied on what was discussed in the first session. I asked any questions that I had not had an opportunity to bring up previously, or followed up on what a participant had said, based on listening to the recordings. Any questions that I deemed to be sensitive were asked in the second interview, given that a degree of rapport had been established between the participants and myself by this time.

5.5. Data analysis

The combined approach of Taylor and Littleton's (2006) method of narrative-discursive analysis and Foucault's (1978/1990) analytics of power was used to analyse the participants' narratives. In Taylor and Littleton's (2006) approach, the focus is placed on how identity work is achieved through narrative and how speakers' identities are shaped and constrained by discursive resources (i.e., interpretative repertoires and canonical narratives). This approach allows for an analysis of how a person constructs and negotiates her identity within the micro-level of everyday interaction and narration. The other part of this combined method, which is grounded in Foucauldian thought, involves an analysis of how a person's identity construction is located and produced within a network of power relations and social practices. As I argued in the previous chapter, by combining the narrative-discursive approach with an analysis of power, one can analyse both the macro- and micro-levels of identity construction.

Before the analysis took place, it was necessary to transcribe all of the interview material, which enabled greater familiarisation with the data (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). The recordings were transcribed using both “naturalised” and “denaturalised” methods (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). “Naturalised” methods, according to Oliver et al. (2005), involve transcribing the interviews verbatim and including not only speech but “involuntary vocalisations” (e.g., laughing), “response tokens” (e.g., mm hm), and occasionally “non-verbal vocalisations” (e.g., gesticulating) (p. 1283). Other factors were also considered, such as whether or not to change grammar, slang, and the participants’ talk when it differed from Standard English (Oliver et al., 2005). Following denaturalised methods, I occasionally made changes, rather than merely trying to stay as close to the “real” conversation as possible. For instance, I sometimes changed the grammar to make speech clearer, but I retained the use of slang to indicate the nuances of South African speech and the gay and lesbian sub-culture. These decisions around transcription are very often ignored, but it is vital to acknowledge how the researcher has influenced the representation of participants, and ultimately the outcomes (Oliver et al., 2005). Moreover, this ensures transparency on the researcher’s part.

Taylor and Littleton (2006) explain, in their narrative-discursive method, that, during the process of reading, sorting the data is also needed, in order to consider all the interview material. They do not, however, offer an explanation for what they mean by sorting, which is arguably an important part in the stage of data processing. For this purpose, “coding” was used, which involved a cyclical process of categorising patterns that emerged in the text (Macleod, 2002, p. 21). The transcriptions were kept in electronic format and were coded by underlining the phrases and words in different colours. All the interviews were coded, and the codes were then listed in an Excel workbook and sorted into larger groups, or overall themes. The extracts were then transferred into Excel and each group of codes was stored on a separate sheet of the workbook. Each code was then re-coded according to recurring ideas and patterns, for a fine-grained analysis of the data.

This exercise in data processing, in turn, facilitated the two tasks of analysis that Taylor and Littleton (2006) propose. Although there are two analytic tasks, these are not independent of each other, but form part of an iterative process. The one task involved looking for patterns both within a single interview, and across interviews with different participants. Interpretative repertoires

were identified as patterns in how participants talked about certain aspects of their lives; for instance, recurring metaphors, words, and ideas were highlighted. Canonical narratives were similarly identified, by searching for frequent ways in which an event or phenomenon was narrated. For example, events in developing a sexual identity could be constructed in a particular order across the participants' talk. The reason for doing this was to analyse what specific discursive resources (such as interpretative repertoires or canonical narratives) speakers drew upon, or were made available by the social and discursive context.

With the incorporation of Foucault's (1978/1990) analytics of power, it was additionally necessary in this analytic "step" to consider what relations of power shaped the participants' identity construction. For the purposes of the analysis, power was conceptualised in terms of practices (such as "confession"), or processes (such as "normalisation"), and through dominant ideologies (e.g., heteronormativity, patriarchy, etc.). Given that power is transmitted through discourse (Foucault, 1978/1990), relations of power could be identified through the discursive resources that the participants utilised in their narratives.

The other analytic task required an in-depth consideration of a particular discursive resource within a participant's interview (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). The focus of this task was on *how* the resource functioned and how it was reflexively negotiated by the speaker. As was explained in the previous chapter, a discursive resource both facilitates and constrains how a person can talk about or narrate an event, and, therefore, places constraints on how she can construct her identity in talk. In addition, when identity construction is viewed through a Foucauldian lens, one can see how a person constructs her identity according to and against prevailing norms.

Therefore, all of the extracts were analysed for the ways in which speakers' narratives were shaped by discursive resources and within a network of power relations. This involved identifying the subject positions that were made available to the speakers by particular discursive resources or within certain social contexts, and how the speakers negotiated these positions. Contexts, such as the university, were therefore analysed for how they facilitated speakers, or provided them with opportunities to take up particular positions and construct a sense of self.

In this project, power was understood as perpetually circulating in talk (Foucault, 1978/1990). Thus, a speaker's agency, or ability to negotiate her identity, was considered for how it was afforded by the power imbued in certain positions. For instance, by drawing on the coming out canonical narrative, participants could position themselves as part of the wider LGB community and, in doing so, be in a position to challenge being constructed as "abnormal" within a heteronormative society.

Discursive resources and social conditions are never entirely productive or restrictive. Therefore, the socio-cultural contexts and discursive resources that shaped a speaker's narrative were additionally analysed for their restrictive effects, and how a speaker's identity could become troubled in these conditions (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Trouble was identified by searching for contradictory subject positions that a speaker adopted, in the space of one interview, as well as acknowledging the previous positions that potentially constrained a person's talk in an interview. Positions that speakers appeared to move away from were identified as undesirable or problematic, and thus also signalled trouble. Furthermore, it was important to consider the socio-cultural locations in which the speakers positioned themselves, and how this placed constraints on the subject positions that they could occupy. In other words, a speaker's location in an African community could at times prevent her from taking up the position of "lesbian".

Foucault's (1978/1990) concept of "resistance" is useful in this part of the analytic process, in that it highlights the opportunities for resistance that can arise in any discourse (or discursive resource) and how identity construction is never congruent. Speakers do not, therefore, simply draw on socially-established ways of speaking, or constructions of the self, but rather contradict these at times by taking up alternative positions. There are, however, never any "great radical ruptures" of dominant ideologies (Foucault, 1978/1990, p. 96). This means that at times the participants might draw on a canonical narrative, but in certain moments they could be seen to challenge or move away from the storyline of that particular narrative. Therefore, during the analysis, opportunities or moments of resistance were searched for and considered for how they were negotiated by the speaker(s).

Taylor and Littleton (2006) emphasise that the two analytic tasks of the narrative-discursive method are inextricable, in that any consideration of a discursive resource would inevitably raise

questions about its effects on identity work, and how the resource works both as a productive and restrictive factor would be indicative of the type of resource it is. These tasks did not simply follow on from each other; rather, the analysis moved back and forth between them. The analysis of power, which was incorporated into the narrative-discursive method, was approached in a similar way. Hence, the relations of power that were imbued in participants' narratives and identity work were identified. At the same time, speakers' narratives were considered for *how* their identities were produced and negotiated within particular locations and amidst certain power relations.

Once the analysis neared the point of completion, each participant was sent a copy of the analysis. This was not an attempt to elicit as true an account of the participant's life as possible, as both identities and people's narratives were theorised within this project as always contingent upon contextual factors, and always open to change. Instead, this provided participants with a final opportunity to make any changes to their narratives that they felt were necessary, remove identifiable information, and comment on my interpretations. In turn, this enabled them a degree of involvement in the analysis. The participants who responded did so quite positively. One participant commented: "I think you got it all pretty much right", while another said that she "trusted" my analysis. Such comments do, however, position me as the "expert" researcher who can examine their lives and do so accurately, even though I stated to the participants that this was not my intention. Moreover, although one participant felt that it was "a little disturbing" to read about herself, none of the participants made any suggestions for alterations. McCormack (2004) had similar findings, in that the participants in her study either made minor changes, or wished to have little involvement in their stories. Nevertheless, part of practising as an ethical researcher entails "accepting the level of participation each woman chooses" (McCormack, 2004, p. 234), as this prevents the researcher from imposing her expectations on the participants.

5.6. Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC) of the Department of Psychology at Rhodes University, prior to any data collection. In keeping with the guidelines of the RPERC, consideration for ethical issues such as informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and the role of the researcher were followed in this project. These

matters are all of vital importance in a project such as this, given that the subject of sexuality is particularly sensitive and personal, and potentially distressing for participants (Kelly, 2006b).

Before any participants were recruited, I requested permission from the Office of the Dean of Students to contact the general student body via e-mail to make them aware of the project. In addition to this, I sought permission from the President of OUTRhodes at the time to use the members' mailing list. The e-mailing lists at Rhodes University are used extensively for various reasons (e.g., to advertise events, raise awareness about current issues, etc.). Nevertheless, I believed it was necessary to gain permission from authoritative figures in the University and in the LGB community in order to avoid being accused of trying to recruit participants in an unethical manner. I shall now discuss the ethical guidelines that I followed in this project, by drawing on Brinkmann and Kvale's (2008) contributions.

First of all, to obtain informed consent from the participants, I was required to provide the rationale for conducting the study and explain the general design of the project (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). As Brinkmann and Kvale (2008) explain, informed consent also means that the participants are made aware that their participation is voluntary, and that they have the right to terminate involvement at any point. Furthermore, participants need to understand who has access to the interview transcripts and that they are aware that the study will be published and made publicly available. Before the interviews took place each participant was required to read and sign a consent form (Appendix 3), which explained the purposes of the project, as well as explaining the participant's rights in more detail.

Secondly, by maintaining confidentiality, I was required to protect the participants' anonymity by not revealing any identifiable characteristics (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). Each participant was required to choose a pseudonym, which was used throughout the study. Any names of places or people that the participants mentioned that would reveal the participants' or others' identities were removed or pseudonyms were used. In addition, participants were given the opportunity, in the second interview, to clarify anything that was said in the first interview, or to retract information. As already mentioned, copies of the results were returned to the participants, thus supplying them with another chance to make any comments about the research or their participation. The

participants, therefore, had many opportunities in which to modify any identifiable information or to withdraw from the project.

The third ethical consideration, according to Brinkmann and Kvale (2008), is that the consequences of the study are addressed by the researcher, in order to minimise the risk of harm that the participants might face, and to increase the benefits of participation. Brinkmann and Kvale (2008) warn that qualitative interviews, particularly in psychology, can often “lead to quasi-therapeutic relationships” (p. 267). The subject of sexuality is especially sensitive, and it is important to remember the psychological and physical harm that lesbians continue to face when constructing their sense of sexual identity. Therefore, participants in this study were warned that the process could be potentially upsetting, and were offered a number of options for free psychological counselling if they wished to discuss anything further. It was, in addition, my responsibility to ensure that the interviews remained focused on the construction of each participant’s sexual identity, rather than trying to probe into topics that caused distress.

While it is vital to note the potential harm that participants may face, it is also important to consider the benefits that they might receive from taking part. At the end of the second interview with each of the participants, I asked them how they experienced taking part in the project. Linda, for example, describes feeling “very safe” during the interviews and that, by telling her story, she was able to “let go a little bit more of the hurt”. Kate feels that it “allow[ed] for quite a lot of self-reflection” and that she “enjoyed it quite a lot”. Although it was difficult at times for participants to recall certain events, it was perceived to be a positive and helpful experience.

The fourth ethical concern is recognising the role of the researcher, particularly because she not only analyses the data, but also happens to be the “main instrument for obtaining knowledge” in the first place (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008, p. 268). Brinkmann and Kvale (2008) believe that this means the researcher must balance a professional distance with a personal friendship, which they acknowledge is not an uncomplicated task. This is especially pertinent to this study, as I was the Health and Well-Being Representative on the committee of OUTRhodes at the time, and knew many of the members. It was crucial, therefore, to discuss this relationship before the interviews were conducted, so as to draw some boundaries between our interactions in the context of the interviews, compared to social situations. I explained, for instance, that I would not speak about

the interviews in front of other people, so that the participant's anonymity could be protected. Furthermore, one friend who participated describes how she felt "awkward", because she was not sure whether to point out that we had met at a party that she spoke about. This opened a space for us to discuss the blurred lines between our being friends, as well as being a researcher and a participant. What is termed "reflexivity" is another way of acknowledging the researcher's role in the research process (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 413). This practice shall be explained in the following section on ensuring transparency and transferability in the study.

5.7. Ensuring transparency and transferability through reflexivity

While positivist terms, such as reliability and validity, are criticised in qualitative research, a "critical process of reflection", according to Kelly (2006a), can prevent the researcher from manipulating data to confirm predetermined aims (p. 374). Hence, reflexivity is something that is emphasised, both in social constructionist and feminist research endeavours, as a means through which the researcher can remain transparent (Gergen, 2008, p. 287). Parker (2005) explains that this requires the researcher not to provide a "merely subjective" account, but to engage in a "self-consciously and deliberately-assumed position" (p. 26).

Remaining reflexive requires the researcher to describe her "thoughts and feelings" while doing the research (Parker, 2005, p. 27), as well as reflecting on and discussing how interpretations and conclusions were drawn (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). Parker (2005), like other qualitative researchers (e.g., Jootun & McGhee, 2009; McCormack, 2004), suggests using a research diary to facilitate reflexivity. Recognising the value of such an exercise, I used a journal during the data collection and analysis. This was used to record my personal comments or feelings about the interviews, the interaction with the participant, or ideas about interpretation. My role as the researcher and my influence in the collection and interpretation of the data shall be addressed for the rest of this section.

The researcher must, first of all, recognise her role and involvement in the study (Gergen, 2008). Working within the framework of narrative inquiry, it is crucial to remember that the stories that are told are co-constructed by the participant and the researcher (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). The interview is affected also by the personal features of the researcher, which can influence how participants position themselves and respond (Hallowell, Lawton & Gregory, 2005). Each of the

participants could have reacted in different ways to various aspects of my identity: as a “white” middle-class woman, a lesbian, a Master’s student, an interviewer, how I dressed, and so forth.

Commonalities between the participants and I were important in establishing understanding and rapport (Olesen, 2003) and enabled the co-construction of narratives (Gergen, 2004). Following Hill Collins’ (1986, as cited in Olesen, 2003) notion of “insider/outsider”, the characteristics that I shared with the participants would have, at times, allowed me an insider’s perspective (p. 351). In addition, I have had similar experiences to the participants and have knowledge of jargon used in the LGB community, which would facilitate the research conversation (Jootun & McGhee, 2009). Gergen (2004) explains that, in these situations “certain assumptions of similarity may lead to embellishments on themes that might be avoided were the listener someone completely different” (p. 279). This insider position meant that I often, although not always, had a good understanding of what my participants were talking about. The participants recognised this by saying, “You know?”, or using terms such as “gaydar” and not explaining them, as they might have done when speaking to someone “outside” of the LGB community. Thus, I could “read between the lines”, both in the data collection and analysis, by making interpretations or assumptions that might not be evident to researchers in an “outsider” position (Jootun & McGhee, 2009, p. 45).

The power relations that play out between the participants and the researcher are another component of qualitative interviews (Gergen, 2008; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). Although I personally knew five of the participants and shared certain features with all of the participants, this did not erase the power relations that inevitably form in the research relationship. There are a number of advantages that I could have had compared to the participants (Gergen, 2008). For instance, I was not in the same vulnerable position as the participants, who were expected to discuss intimate details about their lives. Despite this, I did not hide my sexual identity and referred to my own experiences when they appeared to be applicable. There were also moments when a participant would agree with something that I had said, and this could be owing to the fact that she either felt the same, or that she felt compelled to agree based on my status as the researcher or “expert”.

It is important to note that the particular relations of power between the participants and I could be owing to the context in which the interviews were conducted, specifically, within the university

and in South Africa. A distinction is made within the university institution between undergraduate and post-graduate students, for example, in terms of their experiences of university and the respect that is often accorded to post-graduate students. The difference in age between myself and the participants who were undergraduate students might at times have led them to think that I would not understand the problems associated with being an undergraduate, and might, therefore, have remained silent on certain topics. My position as a “white” woman could have shaped my interaction with the participants who were “black” or “Indian”. This is owing to the racial divisions that permeate South African society. At times, my position of being “white” could have prevented me from fully understanding “black” women’s experiences of their sexual identity or the communities in which they live.

Mauthner and Doucet (2003) note that power relations can also shape the process of analysis. This is evident in the power the researcher holds in labelling themes (or in this case, discursive resources), and thereby constructing a certain “reality” out of the data. In this project, therefore, I tried to label the interpretative repertoires and canonical narratives in ways which reflected how the participants had spoken about them and, at times, specifically used their words. For example, the interpretative repertoire of “spectacle” involves participants’ talk around feeling on display in heteronormative society and I felt that this word clearly encapsulated this experience. At other times, I chose to label themes according to broader, socially-established concepts. For instance, the “coming out canonical narrative” highlights the recognisable process of “coming out” and claiming a (homo)sexual identity.

Another example of how relations of power can shape the analysis was how I offered the participants several opportunities to make changes or comment on the analysis, yet none of the participants made changes to the results. This could be owing to the fact that, in some way, they felt obliged to accept my interpretations, given my position as the researcher. This silence in itself points to the power relations that are inextricable from any research endeavour.

I specifically tried to approach the interviews as conversations and the content and direction was clearly affected by both me and the participants. Given my “insider” role, at times I adopted quite a directive and informal approach in the interviews, based on my own subjective opinion and experiences. Furthermore, I used informal language, as I tried to move away from the position of

a detached expert, in order to engage more naturally with the participants. My having transcribed and briefly analysed the first interviews before the second interviews took place might account for my comments that were not always neutral.

If conducted by another researcher, the findings might well have been interpreted differently. Nevertheless, in this reflexive account, I have recognised my role as the researcher and the ways in which I have shaped the research process. As I discussed, my position as an insider allowed me to develop a good relationship with the participants, based on shared experiences and understandings. So long as this influence on the collection and analysis of the findings is addressed, a rich co-constructed account can be considered as valuable insight into the subject under study (Jootun & McGhee, 2009).

Kelly (2006a) notes that, owing to the “contextual nature” of qualitative research, there are limitations to the generalisability of research findings (p. 381). However, by providing a clear, in-depth explanation of the entire research process, describing the context in which it took place, and continually recognising the researcher’s role, some degree of “transferability” can be achieved (p. 381). This means that although research contexts may be different, other researchers can gain insight for studies of a similar nature.

5.8. Conclusion

Within this project, lesbians’ sexual identities were considered to be involved in an on-going process of identity construction. Following Taylor and Littleton’s (2006) narrative-discursive approach, lesbians’ identities could be analysed for how they were shaped within narrative by particular discursive resources. This narrative-discursive approach was combined with a Foucauldian analysis of power, which involved examining how power relations on a macro-level shape the micro-level of people’s identity construction. The two (by no means discrete) analytic tasks that were utilised in this method enabled an analysis of what discursive and social conditions (including power relations) shaped speakers’ identity work, and how speakers negotiated their identities amid these conditions. Relations of power were additionally addressed in this project for how they circulated in the interview process. This involved analysing my role as the researcher and the positions that I held in relation to those of the participants. Furthermore, I engaged in a

reflexive process in order to account for my influence on the collection and analysis of the data, as qualitative research is as political as any social episode.

CHAPTER SIX

RESULTS: THE COMING OUT STORY

The coming out story has consistently been constructed as a canonical narrative of lesbian and gay identity development. As defined by coming out theorists (e.g., Cass, 1979), it involves numerous milestones and follows a recognisable path, leading from a time of struggle to a place of success (Hammack & Cohler, 2009; Plummer, 1995). This canonical narrative consists of various interpretative repertoires, which are socially recognisable ways of speaking about events or phenomena (Edley, 2001). These repertoires shall be discussed throughout this chapter, for how they shape the participants' identity construction, particularly with regard to the subject positions that are made available to the speakers. In addition, this chapter shall address how the participants utilise these repertoires, and, thus, the larger canonical narrative, to construct their sexual identities in a certain way, namely, as their true identity which is discovered over time. The relations of power which circulate within the participants' personal narratives and social contexts shall be considered in this chapter. As I shall show, this is especially evident in moments of "confession", when participants are seen to willingly disclose their sexuality to others, which is a practice that has been constructed as integral to the development of (homo)sexual identities. Overall, in this chapter, I aim to show how lesbians engage with this canonical narrative, reconstruct it in their own stories, and actively negotiate their identities while doing so.

The results from this study are organised into two chapters, so as to distinguish between the various canonical narratives that the participants draw on in their identity work. In this chapter, the coming out canonical narrative shall be discussed with regard to how it facilitates and shapes lesbians' identity construction. The second results chapter shall include an analysis of a narrative of heterosexism, narratives of resistance, and a canonical narrative of normalisation, which are woven into the participants' stories of sexual identity. In the next chapter, heterosexism shall be examined for how it is understood by the participants and how it specifically plays out in the context of South Africa and in the participants' everyday lives and relationships. As I shall discuss, the participants utilise narratives of resistance and the canonical narrative of normalisation to challenge heterosexism while engaged in an on-going process of identity construction and management. These narratives resource lesbians' identities in alternative ways to the coming out

canonical narrative, and highlight how lesbians' sexual identities are more complex and contested than simply products of the coming out process.

The table below summarises the interpretative repertoires, or common ways of speaking about events or experiences, which make up the canonical narrative of coming out. Interpretative repertoires provide resources for the participants, because they are made up of “familiar and well-worn images”, which are understood and shared in a particular social or cultural group (Reynolds et al., 2007, p. 335). The interpretative repertoires that constitute the coming out canonical narrative, therefore, construct the events or milestones of developing a (homo)sexual identity in ways that are similar to how coming out theorists construct sexual identity development (see Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1988). The way in which the interpretative repertoires are ordered in this chapter follows the sequence that many of the participants used in the narration of the development of their sexual identities, and reflects the order in which “coming out” is generally narrated (see Plummer, 1995).

Table 3

Coming out canonical narrative
Gay since young
Distress and loneliness
Supportive gay community
Realisation
Naturalness
Confession

6.1. The coming out canonical narrative: developing a sexual identity

It is evident in the participants' narratives that the coming out story continues to be used as a familiar pattern of (homo)sexual identity development. This is not entirely surprising, given the social and historical endurance of the coming out story, and how it facilitates identity construction. Furthermore, Rhodes University is a historically white university and in some ways continues to be shaped by Euro-American standards and ideals. Therefore, within this westernised context, the typically western narrative of coming out would be employed at times by lesbians in their own stories of sexual identity. When participants utilise this story, and draw on the interpretative repertoires which construct this canonical narrative, they reproduce certain assumptions about

what “coming out” means and what it involves. Participants are able to articulate, or speak themselves into being, by employing common ways of narrating a lesbian identity.

The coming out canonical narrative reflects the developmental perspective of “coming out”, that is, the developmental process which involves lesbians (and gay men) undergoing various milestones, which results in their acquiring a positive sexual identity. When drawing on this canonical narrative, lesbians are seen to construct their sexual identity as a product of this developmental process, and speak about their sexual identity as a “true” part of themselves. For instance, when using the repertoire of “gay since young”, the participants draw on the familiar image of the “tomboy”, thus, constructing their sexuality as something that was there all along. The periods of childhood and adolescence are commonly constructed in coming out models as times which are marked by lesbians’ feelings of despair and isolation (see chapter two). This is evident in the participants’ use of the interpretative repertoire of “distress and loneliness”. By positioning themselves in this way (as previously isolated) the participants can emphasise the positive experience of “finding” the gay community, which is shown in the repertoire of “supportive gay community”. The participants’ use of the repertoire of “realisation” is particularly important, as this marks a central moment in the coming out story and process, when a lesbian “discovers” her sexual identity. The way in which the participants construct their sexual identities according to the coming out canonical narrative is further highlighted in their talk around “naturalness”. This repertoire enables the participants to construct their sexual identities as a natural part of who they are. This leads to another significant part of coming out, namely, the “confession” of one’s sexual identity. The participants draw on the repertoire of confession to show how they willingly disclosed to certain people in their lives, and the positive effects of having done so. By utilising this repertoire, participants can position themselves in a place of self-acceptance and construct themselves as having achieved the essential part of coming out: acquiring a sexual identity as lesbian. The interpretative repertoires that shape the coming out canonical narrative shall be explored and discussed for the rest of the chapter.

6.1.1. Gay since young

A number of the participants began their stories of sexual identity by speaking about their childhood, or early adolescence, and how they looked or behaved like a “tomboy”. While drawing on this repertoire, the participants describe dressing or behaving in ways that strayed from

heterosexual gender norms. When the participants utilise this repertoire, they can construct their sexuality as something that has been a part of them all along, and, thus, construct themselves as having been “gay since young”. This is exemplified by Ashleigh in the following extract, when she begins her story by talking about being a tomboy.

Extract 1:

- 9. Al:** Okay. Um (.1) now (.1) um can you (.2) tell me how you came to see yourself as lesbian(!) um (.1) or whatever label you like to use um and your experiences of this?
- 10. As:** Well basically, I'd say everything started in um (.2) junior school
- 11. Al:** Okay
- 12. As:** ((clears throat)) Where there was a sort of (.3) um (.2) I was one of the boys kind of thing (.2) um=
- 13. Al:** =So you mean you hung out with the boys?
- 14. As:** Ja I had guy friends and I was (.1) um into all the guy sports and (.1) stuff like that, and um then=
- 15. Al:** =What kind of sports?
- 16. As:** Like rugby
- 17. Al:** Oh, really(!)
- 18. As:** Ja we'd would play rugby at break time and then (.1) um (.2) I played cricket for the girls' [team] um (.2) and just generally all round sort of [tomboy] in junior school. Um Into the whole climbing trees and doing things with my guy friends [you know] and um=
- 19. Al:** [Uh huh]
- [mm]
- [uh huh] =Like getting dirty
- 20. As:** Ja, like I was never sort of (.2) go to the friend's house (.1) have a sleepover party, you know, and wake up on each other.

In this extract Ashleigh constructs her time in junior school as the starting point of the development of her sexual identity. At one point I show surprise about Ashleigh having played rugby, given that I took part in very different activities while growing up. It is after this, that Ashleigh positions herself as a “tomboy” and then uses the rhetorical strategy of describing her involvement in typically male activities to explain her position. Ashleigh further defends this tomboy position by pointing out how she did not take part in other activities, such as having a “sleepover party”, which would presumably be considered a “normal” pastime for young (heterosexual) girls. While considering her identity development retrospectively, and by utilising this repertoire, Ashleigh is able to construct her sexual identity as having been evident from when she was young. Furthermore, she is able to construct how her sexuality was visible through the ways in which she did not comply to the heterosexual norm while growing up.

In the next extract, Neo similarly positions herself as a tomboy and uses this position to describe how her sexuality has been a part of her for a long time.

Extract 2:

- 38. N:** All my life I've grown up with (.1) boys. [(1)] I grew up with boys. I grew up with my brother (.1) and that made me grow up with his friends(!). Whatever he(!) did I would [do](!), until I noticed

breasts(!) and so, “Okay, I’m different”, ja. (.1) So let me just say I’ve been, a tomboy, in a [way], so until(!) at some stage of my life (.1) I (.1) realised when it comes to dating(!) guys I’ve got a [problem].

39. A: [mm hm] [mm hm]
[okay] [mm hm]

[...]

44. N: Primary school I’d just go and play around with boys and all that and all that. Didn’t really care(!).

Early on in her narrative, Neo positions herself as a tomboy and, similar to Ashleigh, she secures her position by describing how she spent her time with boys and took part in whatever activities her older brother was involved in. By describing herself in this way, Neo can construct her sexuality as a part of herself, which she has been aware of from quite early on in her life. In addition, by using this repertoire, Neo can explain why she “didn’t care” about boys. Neo uses this position of tomboy to show how she realised she was “different” and how she noticed “breasts” and was thus “unconsciously” lesbian from early on. As is evident in this extract, Neo’s same-sex attractions did, however, pose a problem for her, given that she lives in a heteronormative society where homosexuality is constructed as abnormal.

The position of tomboy is interesting in that it is a culturally sanctioned position that young girls are allowed to adopt, but one that they can only hold up to a point in their development (Renold, 2006). This is particularly highlighted by Shane in the following extract.

Extract 3:

182. S: I had been wearing ties(!) before that, but it was always like a (.2) well, you know, whenever my mom was feeling happy(!) and I knew she wouldn’t complain(!) about it because like I’m looking too much like a boy(!), you know, um, because I think in high school when puberty hit (.1) when I was supposed to be transitioning, and here I was stuck(!), and my peers(!) were now changing into lovely ladies and I was still like, “So (.1) let’s go buy sneakers”. Um (.1) she was getting a bit annoyed(!) with the ties, you know?.

In her narrative, Shane positions herself as being a tomboy from when she was young and especially talks around the way she dressed to explain this position. She does this by describing how she wore specifically masculine clothing, namely, “ties”. In this extract, Shane reflects on how her choice of clothing was negotiated within her relationship with her mother and within broader society. It appears that Shane recognised that her mother might react in some way, as she talks about choosing to wear ties at specific times, when she knew her mother was in a good mood and, therefore, would not complain. Shane acknowledges that by wearing these clothes she could be labelled by others as “looking... like a boy”, and seen to be over-stepping gender norms. However, this only signals a problem once Shane is in high school – at which point she is expected

to embrace her gender identity and follow gendered norms of how to dress in feminine ways, as a “lovely lady”, like her peers. Shane points this out by highlighting her mother’s growing annoyance with her choice of clothes. Hence, while girls may choose to act or dress differently during childhood, they are expected to grow out of this behaviour. It is clearly at this point that it is no longer acceptable for Shane to dress in masculine ways. When females are seen to challenge these gender norms, it potentially places them in a position where their sexuality could be questioned as non-normative. This is highlighted in the next extract, in which Shane describes her behaviour when she was younger.

Extract 4:

- 16. S:** Um (.1) like I said before I was ten I thought I was normal(!) you know, because you know (.1) I had lots of guy(!) friends=
17. A: =You thought you(!) were normal before you were ten?
18. S: Ja, I thought it was normal for girls to be holding hands and kissing, and [(1)] I that was perfectly fine(!), um (.1) and in grade 4(!) someone called me gay(!)=
19. A: [Oh] =Really?
20. S: Ja. And I was just like, ja(!) and I was just like, “What does it mean to be gay(!)? I don’t know what this word(!) means”, so I ran to my grade 4 teacher and asked her what gay was(!) and she explained what it was (.1) and I said to her, “Am I(!) gay?” And she said, “No(!) (.1) you’re a tomboy”.

This extract once again highlights the speaker’s use of the repertoire of “gay since young”, and constructs her sexual identity as something that was always there, even if she was unaware of it. For instance, Shane constructs her behaviour with other girls as being “normal” and, therefore, something that she did not think about when she was young. In addition, Shane contrasts how she sees herself as normal with the moment when she was called “gay”, and, thus, positioned by someone else as abnormal. This moment also highlights the heteronormative assumptions that construct behaviour such as kissing and holding hands as signs of intimacy, and, thus, indicators of one’s sexual identity. What is particularly significant in this extract is that Shane’s teacher makes Shane believe that she was just a “tomboy”. By labelling her as this, Shane’s teacher re-positions her within the “normal” confines of gendered behaviour, and, thus, attempts to reject the undesirable position of “gay” on Shane’s behalf.

It is evident in the above extracts that the repertoire of “gay since young” resources the participants’ identity construction, by providing them with ways in which they can construct their sexual identity as an enduring part of who they are. This is facilitated through the position of “tomboy”, which speakers are seen to take up and explain through descriptions of their early choices in behaviour and clothing. In doing so, speakers can position themselves as being

“unconsciously” lesbian from a young age. At times, however, the speaker’s position of tomboy can be challenged by others (such as in moments during the interviews), which requires the speaker to engage in some rhetorical work, in order to defend and explain her position.

Furthermore, the participants’ narratives are interwoven with broader social repertoires, such as heteronormative gender scripts. These norms can present problems for the participants, in that their behaviour can cause others to position them as abnormal or different. Hence, the position of tomboy can become difficult for young women to occupy later in life (Renold, 2006). According to coming out theorists, this position of being different can trigger negative emotions, which shall now be described.

6.1.2. Distress and loneliness

Before being able to identify as lesbian, a person is expected to endure some degree of suffering (Cass, 1979). Hence, a period of emotional problems is common in the coming out story (Plummer, 1995). This is shown in some of the participants’ narratives, where around or before they came to “realise” their sexuality, they describe experiencing negative and distressing emotions. For instance, several of the participants speak about feeling isolated and thinking that there was no one else like them.

Extract 5:

10. D: I was kind of on my own trying to figure it all out [...] I thought I was the only person who ((laughs)) had feelings for somebody else of the same sex.

Extract 6:

64. N: When I found out that she liked me, it’s, for some weird reason I felt relieved(!) because I thought (.1) “Maybe this feeling of me(!) liking other girls (.1) I’m(!) the only person who’s, who’s, who’s experiencing it”. And then (.1) so when I found out that she likes me I was like, “Oh, so it does(!) happen to other people too(!)”, ja, because you don’t(!) know what’s happening, you have just turned 14. Some(!) things are changing in your body, all of a sudden your hormones are also (.1) confusing you. (.1) You don’t know, basically.

In extract 5, Delilah mentions how she felt alone, and that she initially thought her experience was unique. This sense of isolation that Delilah describes, appears to highlight her feeling of confusion, at having to “figure it all out”, or understand her same-sex attractions. Similarly, Neo talks in extract 6 about how she thought she was the “only person” who was attracted to other girls, until she met a girl who was attracted to her. Neo draws on her feelings of relief about not being alone, in order to emphasise her initial position of isolation and the confusion she experienced over her “hormones”.

In the next two extracts, participants describe their feelings of distress around being lesbian.

Extract 7:

38. K: I came out in my third(!) year um (.1) which was, I was quite distressed(!) actually.

Extract 8:

22. L: I previously went to ((university)) as(!) [well], and in fact (.1) I only realised I (.1) I only came to terms(!) with the fact that I was gay probably (.3) when I was (.2) 25?

23. A: [Oh](!) Okay.

24. L: Ja, because (.1) and it had a lot to do with (.2) how religious(!) I was when I was at [((university))]
and I realised(!) in my third year already that (.1) I was not (.1) like [normal], and when I (.1) I tried
to fix(!) myself by (.2) um (.1) approaching one of our pastors at church who was actually a
qualified counselling [psychologist] and so he did counselling with people and I (.1) uh, uh started
going to (.1) to see [him]. Ja (.1) and then uh (.1) I can't remember how long I went to see him but it
must have been for a year or more but he, he was not (.2) he was not into all of that shit that you can
fix yourself.

25. A: [Okay]

[uh huh]

[oh](!)

[okay]

[...]

34. L: Then I started going to another church one of these (.1) happy clappy churches, and they were
extremely(!) focused on (.1) families and couples(!) and marriage(!) and all that, so you start feeling
more and more (.1) out(!) because no matter how much you can suppress(!) it (.1) you're not going
to fit in with that kind of thing and uh so I left that church and went to another church but it also it
was a similar kind of thing and then um (.3) I think I went through quite a bad (.1) depression just
after I moved to ((city)), and at one stage I wanted to (.1) kill myself and part of the (.1) problem
was this (.1) that I hated(!) myself for being gay and not being able to fix it.

In extract 7, Kate draws on the repertoire of “distress and loneliness” and uses this to construct her initial experience of “coming out”. Kate also goes on to explain in her interview that she was especially worried about still trying to “fit into” society, having identified as a lesbian. In extract 8, Linda describes her extreme feelings of distress over her sexuality. As she explains at the beginning of the extract, Linda studied for several years at another university. In her narrative, she describes studying during the “late eighties, early nineties” at this first university, which she describes as a “white, conservative” Afrikaans university. The socio-political context in which Linda first started to acknowledge her sexuality is, therefore, highly significant, given the way in which homosexuality was denigrated socially and legally prohibited during apartheid (see Christiansen, 2000; Cock, 2003; Retief, 1994). In this extract, Linda constructs her religious identity as incompatible with her sexual identity, which she uses to explain why she initially thought she could “fix” herself. She constructs her sexuality as something that is abnormal and which caused her not to fit in, despite her continued efforts to join various churches. The church context that Linda describes is clearly embedded in heteronormative relations and practices. For

instance, the focus is on a particular formation of the family, and on marriage between men and women. By explaining how she felt within this context, and how she was made to believe that her sexuality was wrong, Linda can justify her feelings of depression to the point of considering suicide. This extract also shows how Linda draws on a biological understanding of her sexuality as something that cannot change, given that she talks about how hard she worked at trying to fix herself, and how it did not work. This allows Linda to justify how she can take up a (homo)sexual identity position, and why it was necessary to reject her religious position in order to do so.

Through this interpretative repertoire, a young woman's sexual identity is constructed as a source of confusion and distress. In addition, her feelings of loneliness and isolation are highlighted. This is in stark contrast to the heteronormative life narrative, in which a young girl's discovery of boys and "first love" are constructed as positive and significant experiences in her life. The participants' constructions of loneliness and despair emphasise how homosexual identities are silenced in heteronormative society and how they become sources of distress when people start to acknowledge their same-sex attractions. This distress sometimes enables speakers to construct their later experiences of finding other "gay people" as really positive and helpful. Thus, the gay community is often described in the coming out canonical narrative as providing support and a sense of solidarity for lesbians (and gay men), while they negotiate the difficulties of living in the confines of heteronormative society.

6.1.3. Supportive gay community

Cass (1979) posits that in the stage of *identity tolerance* a lesbian or gay man might start to seek out the LGB community, once her/his identification as lesbian/gay becomes stronger. The coming out story typically portrays this community as a source of support for lesbians (and gay men) and a major feature in their lives, especially while trying to claim a (homo)sexual identity within a heterosexist society.

Several participants construct their first experiences of OUTRhodes, the LGB student society, as supportive and providing a space in which members can feel like part of a family.

Extract 9:

- 257. C:** There's something of a (.3) sort of a sisterhood [...] There's a support there(!) and you kind of (.1) get (.2) you, you're automatically part of the group.

Extract 10:

2.102. As: Just sort of (.1) welcomed like I felt (.1) sheltered(!). I suppose, if that's the word.

Caroline has not had much experience with OUTRhodes, but she describes it in positive, familial terms in extract 9. Similarly, in extract 10, Ashleigh constructs the society as a source of acceptance and support, and even protection. While drawing on this repertoire, the participants construct the LGB student society as supportive in that it functions as a family unit. This is significant, given that young lesbians' and gay men's home environments are not always spaces in which they experience acceptance from others (Graziano, 2004a; Kheswa & Wieringa, 2005; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995).

A few of the participants positively describe OUTRhodes and the broader LGB community as providing spaces in which they could feel comfortable about their sexuality.

Extract 11:

30. D: You could just be(!) (.2) you didn't have to worry(!) (.1) like (.1) you know you could just have fun(!) and have a drink and talk(!) and (.2) like your sexuality wasn't (.2) an issue.

Extract 12:

290. K: Like I didn't know about Pink Loerie. I found that out from OUTRhodes. We went as a group(!), and that was amazing(!) for me. (.1) To feel like you're surrounded(!) by (.1) gay(!) people, you know. You feel like it's a weight(!) off your shoulders. Like no(!) one cares(!), you know. It's just, it's great(!) to feel that sense of community. 'Cause I think, a lot(!) of people when you come out you feel very alone, very isolated. Like you(!) are the only person this has ever(!) happened to you know? (.1) And then to find that actually there are loads(!) of homosexual people out there, you know? (.1) Who have gone through the same(!) thing, who also try to like, fight against societal structures and homophobia and all of that. But um, in my third year and my fourth year, definitely(!), I was a very proud OUTRhodes member. Um, also (.1) I had a lot of my friends(!) (.1) on the committee(!), so I'd get involved(!) there and we also had discussions(!) and meet new first(!) years who were coming out and chat to them(!), you know, so it was very (.1) I felt as though I was very active(!). And I felt like I was (.1) I was proud(!), for the first time, to be, to be (.1) a homosexual woman, you know?

Delilah's comment in extract 11 implies a contrast with previous experiences, when her sexuality may have come under scrutiny and how, in this particular space, her sexual identity is normalised to the point that it is invisible. She also emphasises her feelings of relief, which she constructs as a result of being a part of this group. In extract 12, Kate starts by talking about going to Pink Loerie, a Mardi Gras festival which is held annually in Knysna (in the Western Cape). She also talks extensively about her involvement in OUTRhodes and how this shaped her own identity construction. Similar to the extracts above, Kate constructs the LGB community (both at Rhodes and in wider South Africa) as a place where she can feel comfortable and supported. It is important to note at this stage that Kate is a "white" woman, which may enable her greater access

to the wider South African community, and, thus, enjoyment of positive experiences, which is not necessarily the case for all lesbians (and gay men) in South Africa. Kate is able to rhetorically explain this positive construction of the LGB society by once again drawing on the repertoire of “distress and loneliness” and contrast this with the experience of finding other people who have endured similar experiences. She also positions herself as a part of this community by describing the events and activities in which she has taken part, and aligns herself with like-minded people who aim to dismantle heterosexist structures in society. Kate then ends her description by positioning herself as “proud” of her sexual identity, which she attributes to being an active member in the LGB society. Notably, this feeling of pride is only described by Kate, yet it specifically highlights Cass’ (1979) fifth stage of *identity pride*, when lesbians and gay men are expected to involve themselves in the LGB community.

When the participants employ this repertoire of “supportive gay community”, they construct the LGB society as a space in which they can position themselves as part of a group, or even a family, and, therefore, as accepted by others. The participants position themselves as feeling comfortable within this space and free from the gaze of heterosexist society. Furthermore, this repertoire does identity work for speakers, as it enables the participants to position themselves as belonging to a community of people who share a common sexuality and set of experiences. As was evident in Kate’s narrative, it is, nevertheless, important to recognise that this repertoire may only be available to speakers who occupy a certain position in South African society, namely, the position of being “white”, which continues to be imbued with a degree of socio-economic privilege (Steyn & van Zyl, 2009).

6.1.4. Realisation

Coming out models and the coming out story typically depict a moment of realisation, when a person comes to recognise her sexual identity. When asked about how they came to identify as lesbian, several participants spoke about “realising” their sexuality. For some, this was described as taking place over a protracted period of time, while others spoke of it as occurring in a particular instance. In extract 13, this happens for Caroline over several years of high school.

Extract 13:

20. C: Um (.1) then uh (.1) I think in about grade 11 (.1) an old friend that I had had in grade 8(!) who’d gone (.1) to England for a while (.1) mentioned to me that she had a girlfriend.

[...]

24. C: So I (.1) sort of (.2) I started to think, “Hang on, wait”, and started to have (.1) to question myself a [bit], wonder if I was maybe(!) bi, maybe(!) [gay], um (.1) there [were a couple of (.1) girls]
25. A: [Oh ja?] [okay] [so you noticed a similarity] (.1) with her?
26. C: Ja (.1) um there were a couple of girls that I was attracted to, but it took me a long(!) time to realise (.1) that I [was](!). (.1) I thought I was just drawn to them as [people](!), and it took me a long time to realise that I was actually attracted to them [sexually].
27. A: [Uh huh] [oh](!) [mm]
28. C: There was one girl (.1) um [Sasha], and I just fell completely(!) in love with her and it was dreadful(!) because we never got to be friends at all(!) because she had her(!) group of [friends], and she was very(!) straight.
29. A: [mm] [ah](!)
- Oh no(!)
30. C: Um so I just sort of sat(!) there in the background (.1) and that’s(!) when I finally realised, “Okay, this is what this is”.

In this extract, Caroline uses the interpretative repertoire of “realisation”, and constructs the realisation of her sexual identity as something which took time. Caroline appears to construct this as an interpersonal process, in that her friend’s disclosure of her own relationship made Caroline question her own sexuality. This is similar to Oswald’s (2000) findings in her study of lesbians’ interpersonal relationships (see chapter three). Caroline finally comes to realise her sexuality by recognising her attraction towards another girl, Sasha, at her school. Caroline’s moment of realisation appears to occur once she consciously notices that Sasha is “straight”, and, therefore, unavailable to her. In the next extract, Shane also compares herself to others, which leads her to “realise” her own sexual identity.

Extract 14:

28. S: I went and researched like, what this was=
29. A: =In grade 4?
30. S: Ja(!), in grade 4 um=
31. A: =Wow
32. S: So (.2) that(!) plus I watched every lesbian movie I could find(!) I watched (.1) talk(!) shows about gays [that] I could find, um=
33. A: [Ja?] =Hectic(!)
34. S: Because I wanted to understand what this thing was(!) (.1) and um (.1) the more(!) I watched, the more I realised(!) that I was like these people(!).

This extract from Shane’s interview occurred shortly after she spoke about being called “gay” in grade four at school. She initially describes taking an almost academic approach to exploring what it means to be gay, by “researching” it and watching movies that involved lesbians. I clearly show surprise at Shane’s description, because I found it hard to believe that she started questioning her sexuality so young, and that she had access to lesbian films. My reaction poses a challenge to Shane, which causes her to defend and explain herself, with the assertion, “Because I wanted to understand”. Although Shane is initially labelled as gay by another person, she uses the repertoire

of “realisation” to construct how she confirmed her sexuality for herself, and, thus, constructs her efforts of “researching” her sexuality as necessary.

Similar to Shane’s experience, Sarah constructs the realisation of her sexual identity as initially triggered during a conversation with her sister.

Extract 15:

24. Sa: I didn’t actually(!) like (.2) realise(!) what was going on (.1) until my sister just said to me like you know, “Um Sarah you’re, you’re a lesbian(!)” and I was like “What?”

[...]

26. Sa: We were at home and we were just messing about, we were just talking about stuff generally and uh she (.1) after I said something she went ((whispers)) “Sarah you’re a lesbian”. And I don’t think she like said it very seriously(!) and then like a couple of months and I’d been thinking about it, thinking about it, thinking about it, and I wake up in the middle of the night and think, “Oh God (.1) so it’s true(!) (.1) huh (.1) interesting”.

[...]

28. Sa: So after thinking about it, it all just (.2) I don’t know how to explain(!) it, it was just like an epiphany.

Sarah positions herself as blind to her own sexuality until her sister almost “hails” her sexual identity into being. Sarah’s description also strongly supports the idea that sexuality is something that can be uncovered as an underlying true identity. Using the repertoire of “realisation”, Sarah describes this in dramatic, almost Biblical terms, yet Sarah describes her own response in the situation as “huh, interesting”. This implies a sense of ambivalence, and could be her way of troubling the degree of importance which is usually ascribed to this moment.

The notion of a fixed sexuality is the foundation of the coming out story, as it forms the underlying identity that needs to be uncovered through the process of coming out (Bacon, 1998). The following interpretative repertoire is linked to this repertoire of “realisation”, in that speakers construct their sexuality as a natural part of who they are.

6.1.5. Naturalness

At points, a few of the participants draw on the interpretative repertoire of “naturalness” in order to construct their feelings or behaviour as natural. This repertoire enables the speaker to construct her sexuality as an innate part of her sense of self, which is “uncovered” when she “comes out”.

Extract 16:

80. K: Whenever I like got(!) with men or hooked up with men, whatever. It was always very mechanical(!) (.1) like, always thinking(!) about what I’m doing, or where(!) my hand is or what I’m doing. You know what I’m saying? (.1) But with women, like we don’t, I don’t think, it just happens, it feels much more natural(!).

Extract 17:

244. L: I think part of the my big problem which is related to (.1) being gay and how the role that religion played(!) in, in that whole thing of, of hating myself, is maybe (.1) some people are just more susceptible(!) to religion because they need(!) to feel that that there's a right and a wrong and they need to feel that they will be rewarded or and all sorts of (.1) rubbish(!).

[...]

247. L: It was so(!) ((sighs)) oppressive(!) in my whole(!) (.1) being(!) it was so oppressive(!) because everything(!) I tried to live by (.1) how I could suppress(!) natural feelings there was no such thing as actually becoming more in tune(!) with your instincts(!) and everything(!) had to be controlled and suppressed.

Kate speaks about her sexual experiences with women in extract 16, comparing them to earlier experiences with men, and emphasises how much more “natural” it felt with women. She describes being with men as “mechanical” and constructs it as a process of consciously deciding where to put her hand. In doing so, Kate depicts these experiences as unnatural, thus supporting her claim that being with women is more natural for her. In this way, she can construct her experiences with women as being more authentic. Linda also draws on an essential understanding of sexuality in extract 17, when she describes the incongruence between religion and homosexuality in her life. In this extract, Linda again constructs her religion as the cause of her initial feelings of self-hatred, and uses this to defend her current position of being against religion, and Christianity in particular. She also emphasises the words “oppressive” and “suppress”, in order to highlight her sexuality as a core part of herself that was denied by her religion. The way in which Linda constructs her sexuality and previous religious beliefs as incongruent is exemplified in wider South African literature, where Christian ideology continues to be used in arguments against homosexuality (see Arndt & de Bruin, 2006; Horn, 2006; Reid, 2010).

Delilah's narrative differs from the others, in that she consistently rejects the idea of having a fixed, essential sexuality. However, she does stray from this at one point, as is shown below.

Extract 18:

2.184. D: I just want to be able to say, “This is what I am(!)”. (.2) You know, have some kind of fixed(!) identity.

This need for coherence and authenticity is encouraged by coming out theorists, and in western storytelling, and is constructed through the canonical narrative (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). Although Delilah usually avoids this, she is speaking in a context where coherence is salient, and she, therefore, might at times be compelled to try to take up a fixed sexual identity. In addition, by drawing on the coming out canonical narrative in her personal story of sexual identity, Delilah is constrained in how she can construct her sexual identity. Thus, Delilah's comment signals the

trouble that a speaker can face if she is not seen to occupy a position of sexual identity that is congruent with the coming out narrative.

6.1.6. Confession

When homosexuality is positioned, as it still is within society today, as something that is abnormal or different, lesbians are required to “confess” their sexuality to others (Foucault, 1978/1990). This is not only a result of heteronormativity, but is also encouraged by coming out theorists as a way in which lesbians can positively accept themselves by acknowledging their sexuality to others. The interpretative repertoire of “confession” centres on a dichotomy of the truth as either hidden/uncovered (or in/out the closet), and is used by most of the participants at varying points in their stories. This signifies the “will to truth”, as Foucault (1978/1990) explains, which continually shapes individuals’ subjectification and circulates in modern society. When considering disclosure as an act of confession, it needs to be viewed not as an act made by the speaker under duress, but rather as a person’s decision to be honest and tell another person about her “true” identity. This particular form of disclosure occurs within a specific relationship, in that the listener is either constructed as being in a position of authority or as someone supportive (Foucault, 1978/1990). The reason a person chooses to “confess” the “truth” of her sexuality is that she is promised that she will experience a sense of relief, and will come to know herself better. This practice, therefore, is incited through the “will to truth”.

Some of the participants construct their sexuality as a secret that initially needed to be kept hidden, both from themselves and from others.

Extract 19:

- 22. D:** I came back two years [later] still in a relationship or semi (.1) sort of relationship with this person for the rest of my undergrad (.2) but it was all very hush (.1) hush-hush and a secret and all of this (.1) ‘cause she was (.1) Catholic(!) and her parents didn’t know(!) (...) which (.2) is probably why I didn’t admit it for a long time either.
- 23. A:** [Okay] (.2) So the (.1) was the only reason that you weren’t (.1) open about your relationship (.1) because (.2) her not wanting to be open (.1) or?
- 24. D:** I think a part of me also didn’t (.2) wasn’t all that comfortable with it either. (.1) I mean (.2) in my first year I didn’t have a lot of friends (.2) ‘cause I was shy and then when I came back I’d opened up a bit more and I had all these friends and (.1) I wasn’t quite sure how they(!) would react (.2) to(!) it (.1) so I think (.2) I wasn’t willing (.1) to admit it just yet until (.2) I had found a group of friends who would be okay with it? If that makes any sense?

Extract 20:

- 174. A:** And how did that feel, like when you (.1) decided to tell them, like as you were telling them?
- 175. C:** Really strange(!). You know it was a weird thing(!) because I had sort of been keeping it inside and it’s really strange to suddenly be, “Here you go, here’s me”.

In extract 19, Delilah talks about the time when she returned to university after taking time off, and was in a relationship with a fellow student. Delilah constructs her relationship as a secret, and positions both herself and her partner as unwilling to make their relationship known to others. Delilah also uses this repertoire to explain why she did not want to recognise her own sexuality. Similarly, Caroline constructs her sexuality as a secret which she initially did not want to share with anyone. By constructing this as a secret, Caroline can justify why she felt it was “strange” to later tell her friends. These two extracts show how the lesbian identity can be constructed as a stigmatised or undesirable position, as a secret which needs to be covered up. Nevertheless, it is eventually revealed, owing to the social imperative to acknowledge one’s sexuality and to tell other people about it.

Moments of confession are described, by some of the participants, as involving disclosure to others in situations where they feel compelled to “tell the truth” about their sexuality.

Extract 21:

162. A: And (.1) you said (.1) this year has been, it’s been “your coming out [year]”. What do you mean by that?

163. C: [Ja] Um well, I started telling a couple of friends.

[...]

165. C: At the end of last(!) term I told our main(!) group of friends.

[...]

171. C: My main(!) friends I told in the Kaif ((university café)) one day and then ((laughs)).

[...]

174. A: And how did that feel, like when you (.1) decided to tell them, like as you were telling them?

175. C: Really strange(!). You know it was a weird thing(!) because I had sort of been keeping it inside and its really strange to suddenly be, “Here you go, here’s me”, (.1) and (.1) it was strange but it was also really a relief(!). Ja it feels really good to just say, and now uh it’s cool(!) because I can just talk about things normally(!). I can say that I’m attracted to a girl. It’s just a normal conversation, it’s the same as if I’d said I was attracted to a guy(!) and its really great(!) to have what used to be something really strange(!) and foreign (.1) be so normal(!).

Although the confession of one’s sexuality is constructed as a secret, which one may be fearful to make visible, there is a promise that one will experience a sense of relief after telling the “truth”. This is exemplified particularly by Caroline in extract 21. I start by asking Caroline about her “coming out year”, which she then constructs as the year in which she started to disclose her sexuality to others. Caroline clearly draws on the repertoire of “confession”, in that she constructs herself as willing to tell her close friends, and even to do so in a public place. Furthermore, Caroline positions herself as feeling relieved for having been honest with them and highlights the benefits of doing so. Having done so, she can now be open to her friends about whom she likes,

and she can feel “normal” about her sexuality. Through the practice of confession, Caroline has submitted herself to telling the truth and has been rewarded with gaining the support of her friends and an improvement in how she sees her own sexual identity.

A person’s decision to confess is shaped by the particular relationship between herself and the listener. Hence, when a speaker draws on the repertoire of confession, she will frequently construct the listener as an understanding and caring person, who is seen to aid in her self-discovery. This is exemplified in the extract below.

Extract 22:

- 67. A:** Did you tell her while you were at university?
- 68. K:** Yes [(1)] ja, so I told her like (.1) in my third(!) year as(!) [well], like [at] the end of the holiday. Um and I told my mom(!), ‘cause my mom asked me (.1) if I had a boyfriend [(1)] I was like, I was like, “Well actually(!) Mom um, actually(!) I also like girls(!)”. [((laughs))] That’s how I said it. And she was like, “Ah okay(!)”, she said that she [knew].
- 69. A:** [Okay] [okay] [okay] [ja] [((laughs))]
[oh](!)
- [...]
- 85. A:** Ja, okay (.2) um (.1) so your mom was actually quite chilled about it?
- 86. K:** Ja, she was- she said she knew(!). Like, “Oh ja”, ‘cause after(!) I told her we were (.1) on our way to lunch (.1) and then we had lunch, and we had like a couple of glasses of wine(!), very nice, whatever, and she was saying no(!), she always knew(!).(1) And she’s been (.1) she’s been, she’s been the most(!) supportive, because I think for, I don’t know, I think for my parents(!) (.1) they accept(!) it because I’m their child and they love me and they want me to be happy.

Initially, from lines 67-69, Kate talks about how she decided to tell her mother about her sexuality, and how this was prompted by her mother’s question about whether she had a boyfriend. She constructs this disclosure as taking place in quite a relaxed and light-hearted way, and even laughs about it in retrospect. When I later return to this instance of disclosure in the conversation, Kate again constructs her relationship with her mother in positive ways, and talks about the disclosure as having taken place in a comfortable setting. Kate attributes her mother’s acceptance of her sexuality to the fact that, as Kate is her child, she wants Kate to be happy. Notably, it is through moments such as this that Kate can construct her sexual identity in positive ways throughout her narrative, thus positioning herself as being in a place of self-acceptance. This decision to confess is exemplified again by Ashleigh in the extract below.

Extract 23:

- 2.56. As:** Um (.1) the second(!) one [...] the second friend um was (.2) we just sort of had a bonding session (.1) towards the end of the term, we hung out a lot and we were just talking about a whole lot(!) of things we were interested in (.1) and things that fascinated(!) [us] and things that were (.1) sort of (.2) like different [topics] like for example sexual orientation and drugs and stuff like that [like]

- how, how our [feelings were towards that] (.1) ja. Because [(1)] my friend was like very intrigued about (.1) different people and [(1)] the nature of people and stuff like that. So=
- 2.57. A:** [mm] [Mm hm] [ja]
[your ideas around] [okay](!)
- [mm] =Like difference=
- 2.58. As:** =Ja(!), ja like not to say that any(!) of us [do drugs] um but (.1) it was basically (.1) it came out like that(!) and I, I told(!) her and I said, “Well, you know, I like girls”, kind of thing [(1)] she was like, “That’s so awesome”, like [(1) like] she’d love to, get to know me(!) as a whole person, if you know what I mean(!)? (.1) Rather than=
- 2.59. A:** [No(!) ((laughs))] [mm hm]
[okay(!)] =Oh(!) okay=
- 2.60. As:** =My hidden side=
- 2.61. A:** =So almost seeing you=
- 2.62. As:** =She was very, very accepting and saying, “That’s so [cool]”, and really interested and stuff like, not interested(!) [but] but (.1) very open-[minded] shall we say.
- 2.63. A:** [Ja](!) [no](!) [ja] Ja (.1) so she wanted (.1) to get to know you including(!) your [sexuality] not=
- 2.64. As:** [Ja] =Ja.

In this extract Ashleigh talks about the second friend to whom she chose to disclose. Similar to Kate, Ashleigh describes how she was enjoying the company of her friend, while talking about “different” topics. By doing so, she can explain why she chose this particular moment to disclose to her friend. Through her friend’s reaction, Ashleigh’s sexuality is constructed as something “cool” and positive, and as another integral part of who she is. Through this confession Ashleigh is able to reveal her true “hidden” self to her friend, whom she constructs as especially supportive.

Many of the participants draw on words such as “assumptions”, “figured” and “wondering” to construct how people appeared to “guess” their sexuality. In fact, all but one of the participants speak about others responding in this way. This reaction is exemplified in the following extracts.

Extract 24:

- 2.108. N:** Sometimes I’m like, “I’m lesbian” [...] “We could’ve figured that out”, you know. But they’re definitely like, “Um (.1) I’m not sure if you’re straight(!), but if you are(!) (.1) wow(!)”.

Extract 25:

- 172. S:** The funny(!) thing was that with all(!) my friends(!) though, is they kept on saying, “But we knew(!) (.1) there was always(!)” [...] “Something different about(!) you”.

Extract 26:

- 173. C:** Most(!) of them weren’t surprised (.1) and one or two of them knew already(!).

Extract 27:

- 83. D:** Everyone(!) else was really cool (.1) like pretty much everyone was like “Ja that’s great (.1) we all knew (.1) as well” ((laughs)) Surprise, surprise!

In extract 24, Neo acknowledges that others might have come to a conclusion about her sexuality. Neo also alludes to her friends having guessed, based on her appearance and/or behaviour, and that they would be surprised if she identified as heterosexual. Shane similarly points out in extract 25 how her friends recognised her sexuality by noticing something “different” about her. In these extracts, it is evident that there is a social imperative to categorise sexualities, and to “figure them out”. This is, arguably, owing to the heteronormative relations of power which circulate in society, which place boundaries around how gender and sexuality are understood and defined.

Both Caroline, in extract 26, and Delilah, in extract 27, describe their friends as being unsurprised by their disclosure, and Delilah notes how all of her friends reacted in positive ways. This response of already knowing or having guessed is predominantly constructed as a positive or neutral reaction to a person’s disclosure to others. In addition, this reaction constructs a person’s same-sex sexuality as irrelevant in terms of her relations with others, who continue to be friends with or love the person, regardless of her sexuality.

The supposedly prior knowledge about a woman’s sexual identity raises questions about the need to “confess”. If people position themselves as having guessed or having already known, then it begs the question, “Why does a lesbian have to tell something about herself that people already know?”. Although the confession of one’s sexuality is based on the premise that it is a “secret” of a person’s true identity that needs to be uncovered, this does not always make sense in the contexts that have been described. However, given that lesbians continue to disclose, it is clear that the compulsion to tell the truth about one’s sexuality remains influential in shaping the lives and sexual identities of lesbians. Hence, the “will to truth” continues to shape identity construction and interpersonal relations.

The participants draw upon the repertoire of “confession” in a particular way. This is a specific type of disclosure, which is made based on a lesbian’s decision to tell another person about her sexual identity. When the participants describe these instances of disclosure, they position the listener as a supportive and understanding party, who facilitates in the subsequent disclosure. Having confessed, the participants describe feeling relieved, and experiencing other positive consequences. Most importantly, the confession promises lesbians that, by revealing the inner truth of their sexual identity, they can obtain greater self-awareness. This, ultimately, results in

lesbians reproducing the practice of confession in their daily lives and in their identity construction.

6.2. Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained the way in which the canonical narrative of coming out follows a particular sequence of events, which the speaker moves through while developing a (homo)sexual identity. This canonical narrative is resourced by wider social meanings, such as developmental understandings of how lesbians develop a sexual identity. The experiences of “coming out” are evident in the various interpretative repertoires that make up the canonical narrative. As discussed, the participants are seen to draw on these familiar ways of describing and storying their sexual identity. Hence, the interpretative repertoires facilitate the speakers in their identity construction, by providing particular subject positions which the participants occupy. While drawing on these discursive resources, the participants are able to construct a story of how they managed to discover their sexual identity while undergoing certain difficulties. When the participants utilise this canonical narrative, they are constrained in the ways that they can construct their identity. In other words, they are required to rhetorically negotiate their sexuality as an enduring aspect of their identity, which needed only to be uncovered. As I shall discuss in the following chapter, the participants are seen to draw on alternative narratives, in order to construct their sexual identities in different ways to that of the coming out canonical narrative. As I explained in this chapter, it is evident that these women are required to construct their sexual identity while located in a network of power relations. This means having to constantly consider their feelings, behaviour and, subsequently, their identity in relation to heteronormative practices. Exactly *how* the participants negotiate their identities in heteronormative society shall be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RESULTS: HETEROSEXISM, RESISTANCE, AND NORMALISATION

Heterosexism, as defined by Herek (1996, see chapter three), continues to mark the lives of lesbians and influence their narratives of sexual identity (Blackburn, 2009). Within this project specifically, a narrative of heterosexism can be seen as a distinct thread in the participants' stories. In the first section of this chapter, I shall explain how heterosexism stems from heteronormative relations of power. I shall discuss how a narrative of heterosexism is used by the participants when they speak about heterosexism and the various permutations that it takes (see table 4). In the second section I shall address the fact that heteronormative power is not only restrictive in lesbians' talk, but also prompts speakers to take up strategies of resistance in order to challenge heterosexism in aspects of their daily lives and identity construction. This discussion shall include an elucidation of the ways in which the participants can narrate how they challenged heterosexism, particularly in their decisions of (non)disclosure. The third section involves a consideration of how the participants can draw on a canonical narrative of normalisation in order to story their lives in a way that is different to the coming out canonical narrative. When the participants draw on the canonical narrative of normalisation, they are able to construct their sexual identities as a "normal" part of who they are and position others around them as accepting and supportive. As I shall argue in this chapter, when the nuances of the participants' identity construction are taken into account, it is evident that their sexual identities are always contingent upon the contexts in which the participants negotiate their sexual identities. Therefore, lesbians' sexual identities are understood not as products of a developmental process, but, rather, as being continually negotiated and contested through an on-going process of identity management.

Table 4

Narrative of heterosexism	Narratives of resistance	Canonical narrative of normalisation
"Spectacle"	Resistance	Normalisation
Interpersonal/familial heterosexism	(Non)disclosure	Routinisation
Institutional heterosexism		
Race and space		

7.1. Narrative of heterosexism

Heterosexism can be understood as both a constraint and a resource in identity work, because the lesbian self is discursively created within and against the confines of a heterosexist society (Bacon,

1998). This discrimination can take myriad forms, ranging from the mundane, everyday mistakes made by heterosexuals to physical violence against lesbians and gay men. Heterosexism has been constructed as a social problem, whereby heteronormative structures and assumptions are supported and reproduced in society (Kitzinger, 2005). Despite the move away from apartheid, South Africa continues to be marked by heterosexist practices which make the lives of lesbians and gay men particularly difficult (Cock, 2003; Hames, 2007). The participants' use of the narrative of heterosexism, therefore, involves them drawing upon several interpretative repertoires, which construct forms of heterosexism in recognisable ways.

In this section I shall describe the interpretative repertoires which the participants draw on in their narratives, therefore showing how the participants understand heterosexism. For instance, I shall show how some participants speak about being a “spectacle” in public, and how their sexuality appears to give other people licence to stare and point at them. Secondly, discrimination can occur in more private settings, namely, through “interpersonal/familial heterosexism”. The participants draw on this repertoire when describing their interpersonal relationships both in their own homes and within wider contexts. Heterosexism can also manifest on an institutional level, as is evident in the participants' talk around “institutional heterosexism”, which serves to marginalise lesbians through heteronormative relations of power. Finally, it is vital to consider the context in which heterosexism occurs, as heterosexism can take multiple forms based on the social, political and geographical spaces in which it plays out. This shall be exemplified through the participants' narratives of negotiating their sexual identities within South African society.

7.1.1. “Spectacle”

One form of heterosexism is the construction of lesbians as being on display for others to stare at and comment on. The interpretative repertoire which the participants draw on to describe this experience of being a “spectacle” is constructed around a dichotomy of being either “abnormal” or as fuel for “male fantasy”. Participants reflect on this binary and describe the sense of visibility that they feel, using words such as “self-conscious”, being “visible”, and “stared at” by others. In the following extracts, the participants draw on the repertoire of “spectacle” in the sense of being part of a “male fantasy”.

Extract 28:

213. D: Two lesbians are like every man's fantasy and you know (.1) that all a lesbian needs is a man and you know that'll set her straight.

Extract 29:

144. K: Stereotypically like lesbians are cool(!) you know, if you can watch(!) them you know.

A few of the participants acknowledge how lesbians are often constructed as objects of male sexual gratification. This is highlighted in extracts 28 and 29, where Delilah and Kate describe the male fantasy of two lesbians being together in order for men to watch. Delilah notes the supposed ability of men being able to reverse a lesbian's sexuality, as if she has "Just not met the right man yet", which reflects the heteronormative assumptions that still dominate South African society (Arndt & de Bruin, 2006). In extract 29, Kate constructs this as a common representation of lesbians by using words such as "stereotypically" and "you know". This also implies that Kate expects that I will know about this "stereotype" already. This sexual prowess of males, and their fantasy of lesbians, also feature in Kate's account of an evening at a club in town.

Extract 30:

240. K: I've also been at ((straight club)) with my girlfriend on the dance floor (.2) um (.1) chatting, kissing, whatever. But everyone(!) hooks up on that dance floor, it's like a meat market.

241. A: I know (.1) it's disgusting(!).

242. K: And like two guys came up to us and like while we were chatting (.1) and like tried to push us together and were like ((raises voice)) "Kiss(!) kiss(!)", you know?

[...]

246. K: It's an invasion(!).

[...]

248. K: And like what(!) gives you the right to come up to someone and make a spectacle of them just because you, (.1) you think it is something out of the norm?

Kate constructs this club as a "meat market", a place where flesh is put on display, namely, on the dance floor. She describes how she and her girlfriend were doing something non-sexual, when two men tried to force them to play into the fantasy of two women kissing each other. Kate then talks about how this felt like an "invasion" and how she and her girlfriend became a "spectacle" for others. In the final line of the extract, Kate highlights how this was not only fuelled by male desire, but also stems from homosexuality being constructed as "out of the norm".

Several participants talk about situations when they have felt on display and were in some way conspicuous.

Extract 31:

258. K: People (.1) if you hold hands(!) with your girlfriend, people stare(!), people point(!), people make comments(!). (.1) Which, I think like, I'm like, "Okay, do(!) it, at least you're seeing it".

Extract 32:

245. S: Everyone looks at you like you're (.1) the freak at the zoo(!) [...] and people stare(!) and it's, uncomfortable.

Extract 33:

171. D: I just wouldn't want (.2) I don't want(!) to give people a reason(!) to stare (.1) or comment (.1) or [...] Look at us like we're (.2) ducks in a zoo ((laughs)).

Kate describes, in extract 31, how she feels a sense of visibility while on the university campus. By drawing on the repertoire of “spectacle”, Kate shows how her sexuality becomes a reason for others to stare and point at her and her girlfriend. However, she does reconstruct this as an opportunity for others to be made aware that lesbians and gay students are also a part of the university. This position of consciousness-raiser, which Kate takes up, shall be discussed in the next section in relation to participants' strategies of resistance.

Notably, in extracts 32 and 33, both Shane and Delilah utilise the repertoire of “spectacle” and liken this situation to that of being in a zoo, and on display for others to stare at. In extract 32, Shane talks about being positioned as abnormal in her home town, where everybody's attention is drawn to her. She points to this sense of being a spectacle in order to explain why she feels “very, very aware” of her sexuality when she is at home and, thus, she is able to justify her discomfort. Similarly, in extract 33, Delilah draws on this repertoire to explain why she will often refrain from holding her girlfriend's hand or kiss in public, as it would give people an “excuse”, presumably to stare or engage in other forms of heterosexism – a reaction which is evident in Kate's comment in extract 31. These three extracts highlight how the participants construct their experiences of the ways in which they are made to feel as if their sexuality is “abnormal”, by other people's behaviour, which further positions them as a spectacle for the heterosexist gaze.

Whether lesbians are constructed as abnormal or as desirable to men, they are objectified by being put on display for others. The participants are able to draw on this repertoire in order to justify their feelings of discomfort in public, which can then be understood not as resulting from their own non-acceptance, but as a result of heterosexism. This repertoire of “spectacle” emphasises, furthermore, the perpetual surveillance under which lesbians are placed within heteronormative society. In the following sub-section, I shall discuss how the participants construct times when they have experienced heterosexism within their familial or interpersonal relationships.

7.1.2. Interpersonal/familial heterosexism

All of the participants mentioned incidents involving either themselves or friends facing heterosexism in their personal relationships. This repertoire involves the participants talking around experiences ranging from a lack of acceptance from others, to openly heterosexist attitudes and behaviour. The participants utilised this repertoire to describe the relationships both with family members, and with people in broader contexts. This is exemplified by Linda in extract 34.

Extract 34:

- 182. L:** Ja. (.2) Her father is completely(!) (.1) homophobic. Completely(!).
183. A: Openly(!) homophobic?
184. L: Ja
185. A: (.3) Um (.1) can you describe what he's (.1) like?
186. L: (.3) Well, a lot of it is (.1) he, he, he keeps up appearances when (.1) in front(!) of [me], but you know (.2) for uh (.1) we've been together now two and a half years? (.2) He never(!) calls me by my name (.1) like he refers to me as, "That(!) [woman]". Um and um (.2) uh=
187. A: [Oh]
[oh](!) So he doesn't acknowledge you?
188. L: No(!), and if like, for instance, when we go(!) there he (.2) if he's in the bedroom watching (.1) rugby (.2) he hasn't seen his daughter for months(!) (.1) he will come out maybe an hour and a half later to walk past to say hello, that kind of thing, you know? So[it's] that's what I mean by it's [subtle](!), but when there are people there he (.1) will pretend to be fine and he will even offer me a beer or whatever, but like (.1) we're not(!) allowed to stay over. And then even uh Tess (.1) my partner's brother(!), is, is also [gay] and he came out like ten years(!) ago already to the [parents], and he used to get beaten up for it but=
189. A: [Wow](!)
[okay, okay] [mm] [oh](!)
=By his parents(!)?
190. L: By his [father]. So now he told (.1) well at least I'm(!) allowed to actually come into(!) the [house] because [(1)] the brother's(!) friends weren't allowed to even come into the house at all.
191. A: [Ja](!) [ja](!)
[really?]
192. L: Yes. So we should just be grateful(!) that we're allowed, that I'm allowed(!), to even go(!) there.
193. A: Wow (.1) that's (.2) it's like you must just accept the situation (.1) that's what they're saying, like you must just accept it and be grateful.
194. L: Ja.

In this extract, Linda talks about her partner Tess's father, whom she describes as "homophobic". She is positioned by the father as an outsider and his behaviour is constructed as stretching to the point of open rudeness. Linda constructs the father as falling into the recognisable category of "South African macho man". For instance, she describes him as behaving in typically masculine ways and as a man who "beat[s]" up his son for challenging this type of masculinity by being gay (see chapters one and three for further explanation of gender norms in South Africa). The particular position of masculinity that this father occupies is supported by the patriarchal and heteronormative relations of power, which continue to shape South African society. Furthermore,

it is owing to this heteronormative ideology that Linda's relationship with her partner is denied, despite the length of time that they have been together.

Interpersonal/familial heterosexism can play out differently, given the power relations which circulate in different socio-cultural contexts. This is evident in Shane's narrative in the next extract.

Extract 35:

- 2.71. A:** Can you tell me more about why you chose to tell your cousins over MXIT⁹ or(!) try get them drunk(!) first?
- 2.72. S:** Um ((laughs)) so you can deny(!) it in the [morning] or you can deny(!)=
- 2.73. A:** (((laughs a little))) =That it ever happened=
- 2.74. S:** =Ja like, "It wasn't me, it wasn't me". Ja um I think it's pretty much that hey. [(.)] Um (.1) it's, it's also me(!) being comfortable and me being able to, you know when you're intoxicated, you're a bit more tougher, you're a bit more=
- 2.75. A:** [Okay] =You can say things easier=
- 2.76. S:** =Ja(!) you can say things easier, if you get slapped around (.1) uh, you know, they know I can take it when I'm drunk and ((laughs a little))=
- 2.77. A:** =So they would slap you around=
- 2.78. S:** =And I could give it, ja I mean (.2) I think my cousins have been (.1) very, very civilised, but I mean there's one or two(!) of them that I, that I know (.1) 'cause like for instance one of my cousins who's (.1) almost two, he's two years older than me (.1) he said, before I, when I was aware (.1) okay I had accepted myself you know, and he kept on saying stuff like, "Cuz, if you're gay bra. Yo(!) I'm going to fuck(!) you up. I hate gay people so(!) much". Like he could say shit like that all the time so (.1) when I told him(!) I was, I, I specifically (.1) had to get him(!) drunk and get myself drunk so I knew I could take whatever. Because I was ready, I was, "We will fuck each other up! That is how we will be, but we are still family(!) at the end of it".

Shane comes from a different background to Linda, in that she is a "black" woman who talks about living in a township and who lives in a predominantly "black" community. Throughout Shane's narrative, she often talks about her cousins as her "brothers", and positions them as important in her life. She frequently constructs them as "alpha males", and even talks about herself as being "alpha male" especially when she is around men. Hence, the subject positions of being hyper-masculine and a family member are constructed as particularly important in this context. Therefore, Shane's position as a lesbian threatens her security as a part of this family, and challenges the strong masculine position in which her cousins are positioned. It is clearly this position of alpha male that allows Shane's cousin to be openly heterosexist and threaten her with violence. By emphasising the importance of her family, Shane justifies her cousin's behaviour – that no matter what, they will always be family. In this context, Shane's identity as a member of a family is, therefore, more significant than her sexual identity.

⁹ A mobile phone chat programme

Linda speaks again about an incident in which she experiences interpersonal heterosexism in the university context, which she describes below.

Extract 36:

146. L: The head of our department is actually very(!) homophobic. And (.1) my supervisor uh, uh actually admitted to me that when I(!) applied to do my Masters with him, she specifically said to him “You know Linda is gay? You’re sure you’re not going to have a problem with that?”

[...]

152. L: And, and this friend of mine, Tarryn, was in her office and (.1) she has really made her life a misery when she found out they were gay. She’s very, very homophobic (.1) it’s very subtle, and she’s also the ((position of authority)) so she’s got a lot of power(!) in the university.

[...]

154. L: That’s also why like (.1) um I’ve also been on the receiving end of discrimination but I wouldn’t actually (.1) make an official complaint because I wouldn’t get(!) anywhere.

155. A: Is, is (.1) so that’s how you feel? That (.1) the university wouldn’t respond?

156. L: Well, in terms of the, the Head of our(!) Department, Professor ((name)), the way she(!) feels, and even my, my supervisor.

Linda places her HoD in a position of power in this extract, which allows her to emphasise the HoD’s heterosexism, and her own feelings of being discriminated against. As a result of this heterosexism, Linda positions herself as feeling abnormal, and constructs her sexuality has having come under scrutiny. Linda justifies her accusation by pointing to her friend who has also experienced difficulty in the department. Despite constructing this as an instance of heterosexism, Linda talks about her HoD as in a position of power, which is her justification for why she does not make an official complaint to the university, constructing it as something that would be pointless.

As it has been shown in the above extracts, the participants draw upon this interpretative repertoire of “interpersonal/familial heterosexism” to construct a particular form of heterosexism that they experience in relation to others, or in the context of their own homes. These interactions are clearly shaped by prevailing power relations, at times in the form of heteronormativity, while other moments are embedded in patriarchal relations of power. The people who are portrayed as being heterosexist appear to hold certain positions, which allow them to behave in the way that they do, for instance, as an “alpha male”, or a person of authority, which, in turn, reproduces the relations of power that support these positions. During these moments, the participants are seen to negotiate their multiple positions, and, thus, make decisions around which position is more salient or useful within the situation. This highlights the agency that the participants continue to hold despite the heterosexism that they face. However, the participants do not only talk about heterosexism in their

personal relationships, but they also reflect on how heterosexism occurs on an institutional level in their lives, which shall be discussed in the next sub-section.

7.1.3. Institutional heterosexism

Heteronormativity continues to prevail within institutional spaces, such as the university, and can take various forms of heterosexism (Hames, 2007). Some participants describe how homosexuality is silenced within institutional settings and marginalised by policies that shape social relations in these contexts. The participants draw on the interpretative repertoire of “institutional heterosexism” to highlight how their sexuality is ignored or denied in the context of educational institutions.

Extract 37:

344. K: I was never (.1) we were never informed of like (.1) in Sex Ed about homosexual sex(!) or having protected homosexual sex. It was always very(!) heterosexual based.

Extract 38:

2.130. S: I think now the only issue people have(!) is that I can bring girls over at odds times in the morning(!)=

2.131. A: =When they can't=

2.132. S: =And then like, but I did explain as(!) well to them, “Listen there are girl reses that don't allow both sexes so now if (.1) all(!) the girl reses (.1) say they don't allow both sexes but the guys' reses, you know they don't [care]”, it's a bit unfair on me(!) to be like, so where am I supposed to go with my(!) partner, 'cause you can go sleep over at a guy's [place] and my partner and I can't sleep over=

2.133. A: [Mm] [oh](!) =Okay so in a heterosexual relationship the couple can go to a boys'(!) res [(1)] but in a (homo)sexual relationship, you're screwed=

2.134. S: [Ja] =Exactly(!).

In extract 37, Kate talks about her sex education classes in high school, and the way in which the subject of homosexuality was entirely silenced, and how the focus was on heterosexual relations and safe heterosexual sex instead. This highlights how the possibility of being lesbian or gay is totally denied in the school setting, and thus restricts young lesbians and gay men in their access to information, as well as reproducing heterosexuality as the (only possible) norm. The way in which heterosexuality is normalised is further evidenced in extract 38, when Shane talks about a residence rule at Rhodes. In this extract, Shane describes how this rule bars members of the “opposite” sex from staying over in a residence. This rule is based on the premise that all women are dating men, and vice versa, which reproduces heteronormative assumptions. Although the matter of this rule is a lot more complex, in that it is predominantly in place to prevent harm (particularly against women), it came up in several of the participants' interviews, and clearly highlights the heteronormativity that continues to shape residence life and reflect societal norms.

As is evident in this extract, however, it is not something which is always taken for granted, but something that a lesbian, in this case Shane, can actively contest in her talk. The way in which heterosexism can take shape within specific contexts of South Africa shall now be described in relation to the participants' use of the repertoire of "race and space".

7.1.4. Race and space

A number of the participants utilise the interpretative repertoire of "race and space", whereby they explain how heterosexism is produced differently, according to the social, geographical and cultural frameworks in which it occurs. While employing this repertoire, the participants describe the intersection between one's sexual identity and race, and how this results in varying levels of non-acceptance in particular contexts. This is especially significant within South African society, and the wider context of Africa, in that relations of race, power and sexuality are entwined and contingent upon each other. This is demonstrated in the following extracts.

Extract 38:

194. Sa: I think it depends on which part of South African society you happen to be in. Like um (.1) there's different times(!) when you feel more comfortable being a lesbian where it wouldn't matter and there are other times when um (.1) you would(!) feel like your life is in a lot more danger, like for instance I wouldn't go out to the (.1) township(!) I know it sounds incredibly(!) stereotypical (.1) but the stories that you read and that you hear about on TV and then in the newspapers and it's incredibly (.1) disturbing(!). (.1) I mean most of the stories that crop up in the newspapers (.1) are about black(!) lesbians being attacked in the township. So you have to be more a lot more (.1) circumspect when you see black(!) people, because you're wondering (.1) you know, who, who are they gonna to tell(!), who is it going to get back to, are(!) you possibly going to be attacked or not? (.1) Maybe it's just plain old paranoia. But you do(!) actually think that, whereas if you happen to be in Sandton(!) or (.1) anywhere else, that is (.1) more white(!) and therefore you think more liberal(!) you would think(!) ja (.1) you would still feel strange(!), but you wouldn't necessarily feel like you are (.1) in danger(!).

Extract 39:

390. K: Homosexuality is illegal(!) in a lot of countries. You know, in ((African country)) it's illegal, when we went there(!).

391. A: That's where her family is. How did you (.2) negotiate(!) that?=
392. K: =It's interesting, a lot of time we stayed more with the white(!) community in ((African country)). Which is like the more wealthy(!) community. ((African country)) is, it's a beautiful country, but it's very(!), like poverty stricken, it's third world, like Central Africa? And it's very(!) much like (.1) the white people are the wealthy people and the black(!) people are the poor people (.1) it's just that there's that huge(!) class distinction (.1) so when we went out(!) and stuff we weren't affectionate, we didn't hold hands in the street and stuff, but when we were amongst(!) her family friends (.1) then it was fine. Ja, it was fine, um, but ja (.3) I think where I normally(!) hang out, where I normally(!) go out in public (.1) with my group of friends(!) or go to dinner and stuff, it's very chilled.

In extract 38, Sarah, who is a "black" woman, makes the distinction between being in "black" and "white" areas in South Africa. For instance, she constructs being lesbian in Sandton (a

predominantly “white”, affluent, suburb in Johannesburg) as safer than being lesbian in a township, which is an area historically designated for “non-white” people. Notably, this distinction is also made by the participants in Graziano’s study (2004a), who live in a township in Johannesburg. Sarah uses this repertoire to construct “white”-dominated spaces as more “liberal” and accepting, while attaching words such as “danger” to predominantly “black” spaces. However, Sarah is seen to draw on a rhetorical strategy to defend her statement, but saying, “I know it sounds incredibly stereotypical”, in order to prevent criticism from me, or an imagined listener/reader. She further draws on the media’s coverage of violent attacks, in order to justify her statement, and even repairs what she has said by stating, “Maybe it’s just plain old paranoia”.

This distinction between “white” and “black” spaces is also exemplified in Kate’s narrative in extract 39, when she describes going to an African country to visit her (“white”) girlfriend and her family. Kate, who is a “white” woman herself, constructs the “white community” as more affluent and accepting, and places this in stark contrast to being out in public, in the “poor” (presumably “black”) areas. As discussed in chapter one with regard to the legal prohibition of homosexuality, the difference with regard to this African country, compared to South Africa, is that homosexuality is illegal there, which places very real constraints on being openly gay in public. By making the distinction between having to censor her relationship in public and being accepted in her girlfriend’s home, Kate is able to construct her experience of being with her girlfriend’s family as positive, and one which is, in fact, facilitated by the racial and economic structure of the “white” community.

In the following extract, Sarah ties heterosexism to both an issue of class and race. Remarkably, Sarah is the only one to explicitly cite class as a factor against homosexuality. This lack of focus on class could be because race has historically been more pivotal than class in South African discourse. Furthermore, racial groups have been constructed along class lines since apartheid and are, thus, more implicit.

Extract 40:

86. Sa: I obviously come from a, a, a black, you know, my parents are(!) black and so am I, but um it’s very (.1) it’s not something that’s talked about (.1) it’s not something that is accepted even I mean like it happens but you know (.1) it’s something that happens in the township or to people who are (.1) of a lower class(!).

[...]

88. Sa: Ja (.1) so it is basically seen like something that the dregs of society do.

[...]

94. Sa: Not respectable (.1) upcoming, promising people, black people.

95. A: Wow=

96. Sa: =And my family is incredibly proud(!) so it's (.2) I know(!) I would get disowned for it. (.1) So there's actually (.1) really is no point in talking about it.

Sarah positions herself as an upwardly mobile young “black” woman who comes from a proud family. She draws on this repertoire, therefore, in order to explain why homosexuality is untenable in the eyes of her family. In this extract, Sarah is also able to justify her decision of non-disclosure, by pointing to the threat of severe financial loss. It is significant that Sarah does not homogenise the experience of being “black” and gay. Instead, she constructs the experience of one's sexuality as different, based on how one's sexual identity intersects with one's racial and class identity positions. Hence, in this context, Sarah's sexuality is constructed as being unacceptable in a middle-class family. Shane describes, in the next extract, what it is like to be lesbian while living in a township.

Extract 41:

265. S: I don't walk around in my home town after 4 o'clock(!) (.1) I don't=

266. A: =After 4?

267. S: I don't (.2) that's just asking for trouble(!).

268. A: Do you mean um (.1) it's not safe for you because (.1) you're lesbian(!) or because you're a woman(!) or=

269. S: =Because I'm a lesbian(!). (.2) Because I'm a lesbian that looks good in a skirt(!), which makes it even worse(!). (.1) Which is why I don't actually wear(!) a skirt that often as(!) well. (.1) Because, the thing is=

270. A: =So it would be more dangerous for you to wear a skirt even?

271. S: Yeah(!) (.1) not really, but yes(!), because (.1) not really in that you would fit in(!) like every woman(!).

272. A: Oh (.1) ja, ja=

273. S: =But, yes (.1) in that you now firstly look like a woman (.1) but you're into(!) other women, no, no, no, no, something's wrong with this picture. Whereas, like (.1) I always say there (.1) it's, that's why, for me, I(!) feel like (.1) black lesbians, especially in the townships, end up acting a lot like men(!) because you end up being accepted as one of the guys(!) so that you're not (.1) you end up being written off(!) (.1) as someone or something that they'd find attractive, because you might as well have a penis(!) to them.

Shane, who is a “black” woman, describes how she is required to behave when she goes home, and how she has to regulate her behaviour and how she dresses in the township. She draws on the repertoire of “race and space” in order to justify why she does not go out after a certain time, and why she chooses to dress in masculine ways. In other words, she constructs these as necessary survival tactics. Shane points out that if she were to wear feminine clothes she would be able to fit in, according to heterosexual gender norms. However, given the fact that she holds a position of lesbian (and people in the township know this), she might be seen as trying to “tempt” men by looking attractive, and then being unavailable to them because of her sexuality, which would incur

some sort of punishment. In this extract, being lesbian is constructed as problematic for a woman who is “black” and lives in a township. Within this specific geographical and socio-historical location, a lesbian is required to either reconstruct herself as masculine, so that she is placed “off limits” to men, otherwise, she faces “trouble”, presumably in the form of physical or sexual violence.

Although there may not be any legal prohibitions against homosexuality in South Africa, unlike in other African countries, it is evident that homosexuality is still constructed as a difficult and even “dangerous” position to negotiate in certain social and geographical locations in this country. When the participants draw on the repertoire of “race and space”, they construct the experience of being lesbian as contingent upon the context and the multiple identity positions that people hold. Thus, the way in which a lesbian experiences her sexuality is based on how it interacts with her other identities, such as her racial identity, or the space in which she lives. It is evident, therefore, that differences continue to be constructed along racial lines, which reflects South Africa’s history of apartheid, both in terms of social and geographical divisions. Although the use of this repertoire can serve to reinforce certain constructions of race, particularly that of “white” spaces as “liberal”, and being “black” and lesbian as “dangerous”, it is a powerful argument for speakers to explain their decisions of non-disclosure or their attempts to censor their behaviour in particular socio-geographical areas. It is clear, therefore, that when these women choose not to be “open” about their sexuality, it is not out of some feeling of shame, but, rather, a result of their carefully negotiating the surrounding socio-cultural context and considering the potential risks of expressing their sexuality in that space.

As discussed in this section, the participants construct their identity work around the narrative of heterosexism in order to point out the times and ways in which they have faced the heterosexist behaviour of others. Heterosexism can take multiple forms, which are evident in the interpretative repertoires that the participants draw on to describe the heterosexism that they have faced in different contexts and relationships. It is clear that heterosexism is woven into interpersonal relationships, is reproduced on an institutional level, and shapes lesbians’ sexual identities within particular contexts. In addition, it is evident that, through these instances of heterosexism, heteronormative and patriarchal relations of power are supported and reproduced. How heterosexism takes shape in South African society appears to be closely related to the multiple

positions that lesbians hold, namely, their racial and class identities, and the social spaces in which they live. Being lesbian can, therefore, take on vastly different meanings depending on the socio-historical and geographical space in which the position of “lesbian” is negotiated and experienced. In the following section, I shall elucidate the way in which lesbians negotiate heterosexism and are able to take up strategies of resistance in their identity work.

7.2. Narratives of resistance

Although the participants appear to experience heterosexism in their everyday lives, and in various contexts, heterosexism does not merely pose as a repressive force in lesbians’ identity construction. As I shall discuss in this section, these women are able to contest and negotiate how heterosexism affects their lives by using various narratives of resistance. For example, I shall discuss instances when the participants have described heterosexism and how they draw on strategies of resistance in order to take up positions of power. I shall firstly explain the participants’ use of rhetorical strategies of resistance and how they use these to challenge heterosexism. I shall then turn to the participants’ talk around “(non)disclosure”, which highlights how the participants use the disclosure, or non-disclosure, of their sexual identities to resist prevailing norms.

7.2.1. Strategies of resistance

When the participants incorporate narratives of resistance into their own narratives, they describe times when they have experienced heterosexism (e.g., interpersonal/familial heterosexism, being a “spectacle”, etc.) and utilise various rhetorical strategies in order to resist or contest being discriminated against. This can be particularly effective in that it allows the speaker to position the perpetrator(s) in a negative light and to make their heterosexist behaviour visible. Furthermore, it enables the speaker to position herself as taking action, either by raising awareness or fighting against heterosexism, or to construct the experience of heterosexism as not a serious problem in her life. This latter strategy of resistance is shown in the extract below.

Extract 42:

- 2.304. D:** Ja the only homophobia I’ve experienced is when I’ve told people from school that I have a girlfriend and they kind of like, “Well it goes against my religious beliefs, but you know I’m still your friend”. That’s (.1) like things like that(!) ja and like stares(!) in shopping centres but even that can’t be really be judged as homophobia because they may be thinking, “Great(!), that’s awesome(!)”, (.1) they could not(!).

In extract 42, Delilah draws on a narrative of resistance, when she constructs heterosexism as a problem which she has not faced a great deal in her life. When Delilah does mention heterosexism that she has experienced, she utilises a strategy of minimising, whereby she downplays it as “things like that”. Delilah talks about people “staring” and how this could be heterosexist, but again she minimises the behaviour, by describing it as ambiguous. By constructing her narrative in this way and employing the strategy of minimising, Delilah can position herself as unaffected by heterosexism and construct heterosexism as something that she has not had to deal with a lot in her life. This places Delilah in a desirable position, given that heterosexism is often constructed as a major social problem for lesbians and gay men (Kitzinger, 2005).

Several of the participants position themselves as “consciousness-raisers” when they talk about resisting heterosexist behaviour or treatment. This allows the speakers to construct themselves in an empowering position, either as educators or consciousness-raisers. The participants are constrained, however, by the stereotypical position of “aggressive lesbians” (which appears in some of the participants’ narratives), and they work hard to construct their approach as a form of “dialogue”. This is highlighted in the following extract.

Extract 43:

2.160. K: You need to create dialogue (.1) you need to challenge(!) people, those are the people you need to challenge. (.1) I’m not saying you need to go like (.1) in their faces or whatever but if you have the opportunity to talk to someone like that, do(!) it, and try and do it on like a humane level and try and negotiate(!) and try and find a common ground.

When the participants talk about creating or encouraging dialogue, it involves them talking to (heterosexual) people, being open to questions, and doing so in a non-aggressive way. Throughout her two interviews, Kate speaks extensively about creating dialogue with others, and how it can be beneficial by encouraging people to be more open-minded, move beyond stereotypes, dispel heterosexism, and essentially “educate” people. In extract 43, Kate explains that by talking to others some level of understanding between homosexual and heterosexual people can be reached. She quickly denies trying to get “in their faces”, indicating the potential criticism that she could face for raising awareness in an aggressive way. Although the onus is placed on the lesbian speaker to dispel heterosexism, it does enable her to position herself as rising above the effects of discrimination and be seen to attempt to change heteronormative structures of society.

Some of the participants speak about being “open to questions”, even if this places them in a vulnerable position, which is highlighted by Shane in extract 44.

Extract 44:

2.118. S: I let(!) them ask me questions ‘cause I [...] I know(!) it’s very, very like tough(!) to say [you] can ask questions about my lifestyle(!) [like] it’s a very, very=

2.119. A: [mm]

[ja](!) =Opening yourself up=

2.120. S: =Why the hell, why (.1) am I like a science experiment that I need to, you know what I mean? (.1) But the thing is, that’s the only(!) way to, the only way we’re gonna be able to de-mythisise and de-construct the whole ideas that people have(!) in their minds(!), you know.

Although Shane jokes about being there for all to probe in the above extract, she explains that it is vital to be open to others’ questions, in order to reconstruct homosexuality. I also indicate my understanding, given that Shane and I have both been involved in consciousness-raising activities as members of OUTRhodes. Shane also acknowledges that I understand by saying, “you know what I mean”. When a speaker adopts this position of “consciousness-raiser”, she can construct herself as justified in her attempts to educate others who appear to be ignorant or naïve, and, thus, she is seen to do more than merely push an agenda. While constructing her narrative around resistance, a speaker can, therefore, claim a position of power and agency in her reactions to heterosexism. It is evident, in these women’s responses, that heterosexism no longer triggers a response to go back into the “closet”, but, rather, provides them with opportunities to actively respond in productive ways.

There are ways in which the participants can narrate their attempts at resistance more forcefully, for example, by taking power through a counter-attack to heterosexist behaviour. This is particularly evident in Kate’s account, which is highlighted in extract 45.

Extract 45:

226. K: But with (.1) the students(!) there is a lot of homophobic behaviour [(2)] on campus.

227. A: [have you found that?]

228. K: Ja, I’ve also experienced that (.1) first hand.

229. A: Really?

230. K: Ja(!), definitely.

231. A: Can you think of like, what happened?

232. K: There was um (.3) I was at the ((pub)) once (.1) and I was with this girl and we were like, it was late at night(!), everyone had had a couple of drinks(!), and we were just, weren’t making out(!) (.1) but we were like in the corner just like kissing(!) and laughing and whatever, whatever, and some (.1) some drunk guy came up to me (.1) while(!) I was kissing this girl and like (.1) tapped me on the shoulder, like tapped(!) me on the shoulder so I turned around and he was like, “Sorry(!) I don’t like(!) that”, he says to me, so I was like, “Agh, whatever man”, like, brushed it off. So we carried on, carried on. He came up again(!), like tapped me on the shoulder and said, “Sorry(!), I said(!) I don’t like(!) that”, you know, ((laughs)) so I turned around, I was very rude, so I turned around and said, “Well I don’t like you(!), so why don’t you go and fuck(!) yourself?” ((laughs)).

Kate recounts a situation which occurs in one of the pubs in town when she experienced heterosexist attitudes from another student and her reaction to this behaviour. Kate describes her own behaviour within this situation as discreet and appropriate in the context of the pub. This pub is predominantly constructed as a heterosexual space by the participants and one in which students are frequently found kissing, yet Kate, as a lesbian, is excluded from behaving similarly. The fact that the student repeats what he has said highlights how he has been constructed in a position of power, in that he assumes the right to tell Kate what she cannot do, and reinforce that if necessary. Clearly, this space is imbued with heteronormative and patriarchal relations of power. Kate constructs herself as being able to resist this heterosexist behaviour and counter it by swearing at the male student and telling him to leave her alone. Kate does, however, almost apologise by saying that she was “rude”, which could imply that lesbians are normally meant to simply accept heterosexist treatment. However, Kate is able to justify her act of resistance by constructing the male student as heterosexist. By taking up this narrative of resistance, Kate is able to reconstruct herself as being in a position of power, despite her experience of heterosexism.

Although heterosexism continues to pose challenges for the participants on a daily basis, there are opportunities for them to take up positions of resistance and to challenge the discriminatory behaviour of others. When the participants draw on various strategies of resistance, they are seen to react to heterosexism in particular ways, for instance, by minimising its effects, through consciousness-raising, or by taking power through counter-attack. It is evident that there are moments when the participants are able to contest heterosexist actions and heteronormative power and, in doing so, are able to take up positions of power. Another way in which participants can claim power is through their decisions around the disclosure of their sexual identities.

7.2.2. (Non)disclosure

The participants’ talk around “(non)disclosure” involves them describing decisions that they make about whether or not to disclose their sexual identities in certain contexts and relationships. This can be considered part of a narrative of resistance, in that it offers two ways in which the speaker can take up positions of resistance in her narrative of sexual identity. Firstly, as I shall show, it sometimes allows the speaker to resist the imperative to disclose. The second point I shall make is that drawing on a narrative of resistance enables the speaker to utilise the disclosure of her sexual identity as a strategy to challenge heteronormativity. When the participants describe these

moments of resistance, they are seen to negotiate their sexual identities and are continually making decisions around why and how they choose to disclose or not disclose to others.

Lesbians (and gay men) are frequently compelled to disclose their sexual identities. The disclosure of one's (homo)sexual identity is prompted as a requirement of living in a heteronormative society, in which one's (abnormal) identity must be voiced and be made known to others (Bacon, 1998). While the reason for disclosing one's sexuality has changed over time, as I have discussed in previous chapters, this has been promoted in the last several decades through coming out models. In other words, disclosure has been constructed as a positive step in developing one's true sexual identity. Some of the participants, however, talk about feeling "no need" to tell others about their sexual identities, and are able to resist the imperative that is placed on lesbians to always disclose their sexual identity. This is made clear in the following extracts.

Extract 46:

108. Sa: But I know in my(!) [family] some(!) things are just not spoken about. So even if you have an inkling about [something] rather just leave it, you don't want to rock the boat.

109. A: [Ja]
[uh huh] Is it? What other sort of issues wouldn't be spoken about? Can you think of any?

110. Sa: ((Sighs)) Oh, God what else? Uh (.3) adultery(!) is, it's not really spoken about, um (.2) sexual abuse isn't that (.1) really spoken about. I mean it's scandalous(!) when you hear(!) about it and gossip about it, but it's not really something (.1) if it happens within the family(!) then it's kind of just really hush hush.

Extract 47:

327. C: My mom's mom is very(!) religious she's a strong Christian. I love her very much and I will never tell her that I am not a Christian and that I am gay. I will never tell her because I don't(!) want her to have that (.1) on her mind. Um (.1) she's sick now and (.1) I don't know how much longer she's going to be with us. And I'd much(!) rather that she passed away feeling (.1) satisfied and not having that(!) to worry about.

Extract 48:

159. D: I don't see why I should tell everybody(!) that I'm gay
[...]

161. D: What purpose is it going to serve and (.1) it's just (.1) not important (.1) they're not important to me enough (.2) to kind of know.

As discussed earlier, Sarah constructs her family as "respectable", and in this extract Sarah utilises a narrative of resistance in order to defend her decision not to tell her family about her sexuality. It is clear that Sarah has to do some rhetorical work in order to explain why she chooses to go against the imperative to disclose. She constructs homosexuality as something that is likened to adultery or sexual abuse so as to explain why it is not tolerated in her family and how "scandalous" it would be to tell her family. Sarah constructs her sexuality as not being something

that necessarily has to be disclosed in this context, and her decision can, thus, be seen as a way of maintaining the relationship she has with her family. Caroline uses a similar argument in extract 47, whereby she positions the relationship with her grandmother as more important than the “truth” of her sexuality. Caroline constructs the disclosure of her sexuality as something that would make her grandmother “worry”, and which is, therefore, unnecessary given her grandmother’s circumstances. In this instance it is clear that the speaker can justify her decision of (non)disclosure by providing an account of the specific relationship and how, in this case, being honest about her sexual identity does not necessarily have beneficial consequences. In extract 48, Delilah defends her decision not to tell the people in her Master’s class by constructing these people as unimportant in her life. In doing so, Delilah challenges the obligation that is placed on lesbians to “tell everybody” about their sexuality.

A speaker can decide to disclose her sexual identity in certain moments, which she can use as a strategy of resistance, as is evident in the following extract.

Extract 49:

- 318. N:** So one time (.1) we were chatting, it was (.1) on Fridays we would have bonding sessions. So one time we were chatting and chatting about boys(!) and there was this game called (.2) you know those stupid games at high school? Dare(!) or truth?=
319. A: =Oh(!) truth, dare or command?
320. N: Those, those are the games. So we were just talking and (.1) we got side-tracked and we were chatting about a handsome guy(!). (.1) And they were like, “Ah do you know(!) how you act and everything and everything?”, and I was like “Oh, I wouldn’t know” and they were like, “Why(!)?” and I was like smiling, and like, “I’m a lesbian(!)”, and they were like (.2) “Oh!”.

In this extract Neo describes a situation in her boarding house with her female heterosexual peers, and uses the game of “truth, dare, command” to quite literally tell the “truth” about her sexuality. Although this could be read as being shaped by relations of power, such as the “will to truth”, it appears to be utilised by Neo more as a strategy to catch her peers off guard and reveal their heteronormative assumptions. Neo includes herself in this conversation, but there is also a sense that she is not entirely part of it, which emphasises the heteronormative relations of power that prevail in this context. Through her disclosure, Neo is able to challenge the heteronormativity of her peers’ conversation and utilise her disclosure as an act of resistance. Furthermore, Neo is able to bring her sexuality into being and articulate a position which would normally be silenced in conversations such as these, by the assumption of heterosexuality.

In the next extract, Delilah talks about her experience of disclosing to a former friend, and how she takes up a position of resistance to justify her decision to “delete” the friend.

Extract 50:

79. D: I think I’ve only had one person that’s kind of been (.1) “Ja well it’s against my beliefs” you know=

80. A: =Oh really?

81. D: Ja but she, she was a bit of a fundamentalist Christian.

82. A: Was that (.1) um (.1) at university?

83. D: Um (.2) It was two years ago and I joined Facebook and started getting into contact with all old high school friends (.1) and like being gay lesbian it’s, it’s an important part of who I am and I’d gotten to the point where (.1) I’m not going to be friends with somebody who doesn’t know me and (.1) even if it’s just(!) on Facebook as superficial as Facebook is I’m not going to add somebody who (.1) doesn’t know exactly(!) who I am now (.1) so whenever I would add a friend I would message them and say “Yo, (.2) before we (.1) you know get back into contact or whatever you need to know that I am(!) lesbian and I’m(!) okay with that and if you want to be my friend then you(!) need to be okay with that” (.1) and (.1) everyone(!) else was really cool [...] But (.1) just this one person was like “Oh um” She’s quite shocked (.1) and disappointed and it’s against(!) her religion to think that’s acceptable but know she’s not going to stop being my friend (.1) at which point I deleted her as a friend on Facebook ‘cause I don’t, I don’t need to be tolerated.

This event occurred within the context of Facebook, a social network based in the virtual reality of the Internet, which enables Delilah to construct her sexual identity in certain ways, and allows her to manage disclosure in a manner which is distinct from everyday interactions. She can, for instance, pre-empt any questions or rejection at a later date, by initiating the disclosure herself. Furthermore, if she does not gain the acceptance that she constructs as important, then she can “delete” the friend. Given the power of the religious discourse, Delilah’s friend is able to express her disapproval of Delilah and easily justify it. Regardless of this lack of acceptance, Delilah takes up a position of power by saying that she does “not need to be tolerated”, and uses this as a rhetorical strategy to justify terminating contact with her. Although this would clearly be negotiated quite differently in a face-to-face interaction (as friends cannot easily be “deleted”), it highlights how the speaker can take up a position of resistance in the management of her disclosure, which, in turn, enables her to take up a position of strength and agency.

Given that narratives of resistance are evident in the participants’ own personal narratives, it is apparent that there are opportunities for lesbians to challenge heterosexism and negotiate the disclosure of their sexual identities within the context of heteronormative society. There are various ways in which a speaker can resist the heterosexist behaviour of others, namely, through the rhetorical strategies of consciousness-raising, minimising and claiming power through counter-attack. Additionally, a speaker can use the disclosure of her sexuality as an opportunity to challenge beliefs and practices that are shaped by heteronormative relations of power. However,

there are moments when a person decides not to disclose her sexuality, and the repertoire of (non)disclosure is, therefore, useful in that it allows the speaker to justify why she has decided not to disclose her identity, based on the relationship and context in which she is positioned. By considering how the participants negotiate these moments of resistance, it is evident that relations of power and dominant practices are never entirely oppressive, and there are always opportunities for lesbians to challenge and negotiate their sexual identities within this network of power. Furthermore, given the heterosexist conditions that lesbians continually have to negotiate, one's lesbian identity can be understood as multiple, complex, and contested on a daily basis. The way in which the participants negotiate and manage their sexual identities shall be addressed in the next section.

7.3. Canonical narrative of normalisation

There are various ways in which lesbians can narrate their lives. This is shown by the different narratives that they utilise in their stories of sexual identity. The narrative of normalisation is an emerging canonical narrative, in that it is slowly becoming a way in which storying one's sexual identity is used more often. Cohler and Hammack (2007) would term this a "narrative of emancipation", whereby lesbians (and gay men) construct their sexual identities as "normal" and even decentralised in their lives. However, as Cohler and Hammack (2007) point out, an analysis of the use of this narrative must be considered in terms of the context in which it is used. In this section, I shall describe how the participants' use of the canonical narrative of normalisation is shaped by the socio-cultural contexts in which they live and study.

As I shall explain in this section, the canonical narrative of normalisation consists of two interpretative repertoires. The first repertoire of "normalisation" involves the participants constructing their sexual identities as "normal" or even minor aspects of who they are. In this repertoire, the speakers are seen to trouble the way in which being lesbian is constructed in the coming out canonical narrative. This is evident, for example, in how some participants describe the LGB community as unimportant or unhelpful. The second interpretative repertoire which resources the canonical narrative of normalisation is termed "routinisation". While using the repertoire of "routinisation", the participants describe how other people have shown support and acceptance of their sexuality. Nevertheless, this is constructed by the participants as an experience of having "been lucky", which highlights that this is not necessarily experienced by all lesbians.

This canonical narrative is useful in that it allows speakers to construct their sexual identities in alternative ways to the coming out canonical narrative, and the participants' use of this narrative draws attention to how they are continually involved in an on-going process of identity negotiation or management.

7.3.1. Normalisation

The interpretative repertoire of "normalisation" consists of participants' talk around their sexuality as a normal and unproblematic part of their identity. This term is drawn from Seidman et al. (1999) to indicate both a person's own acceptance of her sexuality and the ways in which she portrays this positive construction to others. When talking about their sexual identities, participants frequently describe feeling "comfortable" and "open" about it, yet disclosing it in subtle ways by "slipping it in", which shall now be discussed in detail.

Many of the participants speak about their sexual identity as something which they have accepted and embraced as a part of who they are. This is reflected by two of the participants in the following extracts.

Extract 51:

2.92. N: I've accepted me(!). (.1) I think it starts there (.1) you know. I would say, I've accepted me, you know, and this is something that makes me happy.

Extract 52:

38. K: I can actually(!) do whatever I want and that's okay.

39. A: And it doesn't matter what=

40. K: =It doesn't matter what my preference is. Like, it shouldn't(!) matter actually, at all.

In extract 51, when Neo says "it starts there", this could signify that, by normalising her own sexuality, she could, in turn, encourage others to accept it as normal. In extract 52, Kate also expresses her sense of comfort, and constructs her sexuality as something that should be considered normal, even to the point of being unnoticeable. She is able, therefore, to position herself in a place of comfort and construct her sexual identity as a normal part of who she is.

At times, some of the participants talk about their sexuality as "minor" or position it as not being central in their lives. The taking up this position, therefore, works as a strategy of normalisation that the participants draw on to describe their sexual identity as normal or natural, and bordering on insignificant. This is particularly evident in Sarah's narrative.

Extract 53:

- 131. Sa:** To a degree it was exciting because it was finding out a lot more about (.1) um (.2) I don't know, how do I say it? Like that(!) part (.1) of myself? (.1) But I actually don't really see it as (.1) something that defines all(!) of me. So it was just (.1) you know something that I happened(!) to be, just in the same way that heterosexuals just (.1) don't necessarily define themselves, solely(!) by (.1) their sexuality.

Throughout her narrative, Sarah constructs her sexuality as only one aspect of who she is, and, as is evident in the above extract, she rejects the notion that her sexuality is her core identity. This challenges the way in which a lesbian's sexual identity is constructed in the coming out canonical narrative, that is, as her "true", essential identity. By using the repertoire of normalisation, Sarah questions the need to centralise her sexual identity, which would result in her being positioned as different to heterosexual people. As she points out, heterosexual people rarely (if ever?) construct their sexuality as a central part of who they are. Hence, Sarah normalises her sexuality by actually minimising its importance in her life.

At times the participants used the repertoire of normalisation in order to challenge certain experiences that have become taken for granted as canonical events in gay men's and lesbians' lives. One example is how the LGB community is constructed as providing a sense of support and acceptance for lesbians and gay men as they come to terms with their sexuality. As is shown in the following extract, this is not always the case for the participants.

Extract 54:

- 2.142. S:** I think it just (.1) I was a bit naïve at first. I came into first year thinking, "The gays(!), yay(!), place where I'll be accepted(!)", fuck no(!). (.1) I walked into the first party and it was awkward.
[...]
2.150. S: I felt very vulnerable. [...] OUTRhodes showed me just how cliquey the gay community was.
2.151. A: How cliquey(!) the gay community is?
2.152. S: Mm(!) [(1)] for the first(!) time and um (.1) how polarised(!) it was as(!) well um=
2.153. A: [Okay] =What do you mean by polarised?
2.154. S: That (.1) race does play a game (.1) in it you know what I mean, whether you want to admit it or not. It was, it was very(!) I mean I came(!) into it, this sub-culture.
[...]
2.156. S: Um (.1) and I remember I saw Tom and Chris at the bar with their topless selves and for me(!) it felt like I'd just gotten into a movie! "Gay people I(!) know don't act like this! What the fuck is(!) this?"=
2.157. A: =What? Like you'd gotten into a movie(!)?
2.158. S: Ja(!) like the gay people that I(!) knew were not running around topless(!) ((laughs)) you know, topless (.1) white gay boys, typical of a movie scene, you know, you know, the lesbians making out everywhere 'cause we just got back and it's the first party of the year(!) (.1) it was, it was just, "Oh(!) my gosh! Where am(!) I?". It felt like a culture(!) shock for me (.1) and it really was(!) that, it was a culture(!) shock.

Shane describes her positive expectations about being accepted into the LGB community at university, and how her actual experience was very different. She constructs the LGB society as exclusive and “polarised” with regard to race. Shane develops her account around how, as a “black” woman, she did not feel accepted or included in this community. It is clear in this extract that for Shane, OUTRhodes initially appeared to be a “white” space which was constructed around western ideas about lesbian and gay sexuality, for instance, “topless” gay men behind the bar. Shane describes this experience as a “culture shock”, which exemplifies how she did not fit into this community. The context of the event is also highlighted by the way that it takes place at a historically white university, at which events run by the LGB society continue to be shaped by “white” experiences and understandings of lesbian and gay sexuality. This can serve to exclude “black” lesbians (and gay men), whose experiences do not fit into this mould. Another “black” participant, Sarah, talks about how she chose not to involve herself in the LGB society and cites her reasons for doing so.

Extract 55:

145. Sa: I find that everyone kind of gets, um (.1) I don’t want to insult(!) [people] but really very cliquy-trendy(!) [(1)] and it really(!) is the focus of people’s lives (.1) like it’s the end-all and be-all and I really don’t=

146. A: [Ja]
[okay] =Their sexuality?

147. Sa: Ja, their sexuality (.1) [sorry], ja so (.2) I, I really don’t (.1) I think it’s great(!) because it can act(!) as a supportive [network] for people who do(!) need it.

148. A: [Okay]
[mm hm] Are you talking about the gay and lesbian community?

149. Sa: Ja (.1) within the university ja (.1) so I think it is(!) important for some people, but for me(!) personally I was (.1) just found I didn’t necessarily need to (.1) be part(!) of that network.

In this extract Sarah speaks against the imperative that is placed on lesbians to involve themselves in the LGB community in order to gain the support that is needed to live in heteronormative society. She constructs her sexuality as merely one aspect of who she is, and, thus, challenges the way in which lesbians are expected to view their sexuality, that is, as the “end-all and be-all”. It is evident that Sarah is required to defend her position, given that she is seen to stand outside of the norm. Sarah achieves this by constructing the LGB community as “cliquy-trendy”, as well as a place in which one’s sexuality must be made central in order to gain the support from others. Sarah further positions her sexuality as a minor part of who she is, so as to explain why she is not a part of this community. She is also able to justify her position outside of the network by constructing it as a personal choice, and stating how she does not need the support of this community. After appearing to criticise people in this community, Sarah repairs her statement by

saying she thinks “it’s great” for others. Thus, Sarah indicates that, although she does not need to be a part of the society, she recognises the benefits of the support that is provided by the LGB community. By constructing the community as “cliquey-trendy”, the speaker can thus actively position herself outside of the LGB society. Furthermore, she can reject the way in which lesbians are compelled to make their sexuality a central part of their lives and immerse themselves in a network which can protect them within a heteronormative society.

When the participants position their sexuality as a minor, or a “normal” part of who they are, they can construct the disclosure of their sexuality as different to the way in which it is portrayed in the coming out canonical narrative.

Extract 56:

2.112. S: I’d work it into every conversation(!).

Extract 57:

203. D: I’ve never actually said it (.2) to anyone here like out loud, but I do mention if I’m talking to one of the lecturers or something and we get onto the, the topic of (.1) I dunno (.1) the dog(!) and I’ll say “My girlfriend and I’s dog” and like I try to slip it into conversation like especially in the beginning I tried to slip it into the conversation so that they did(!) know (.1) where I was coming from (.2) ‘cause I think that’s important ‘cause like I like the people I work with.

Extract 58:

2.90. Sa: ‘Cause I mean, even with, even now (.1) I have an entirely um (.1) different(!) set of friends (.1) and they, they all know(!) that I’m gay but I’ve never actually (.1) had to explicitly explain(!) it, or say(!) it. (.1) But I mean they just kinda picked up. And I mean I will, I will(!) talk normally(!), how I would, “Oh no that’s a really pretty girl”. And they kinda just picked up on it.

Normalisation is achieved when the speaker “slips” her sexuality into the conversation, and thus tries not to draw any significant attention to it. For example, Shane talks about “working” her sexual identity into every conversation when she initially came to university. Shane uses this as a strategy to make her sexuality known to those around her, and does so in a way that normalises her sexual identity. In extract 56, Delilah talks about the way that she wanted her colleagues to know about her sexuality, but never told them explicitly. By choosing not to say it “out loud”, Delilah rejects the imperative to confess her sexuality to others, and, rather, constructs her sexuality as something which is a normal part of her life. In this extract, she brings up the subject of her girlfriend as naturally as a heterosexual woman would refer to her boyfriend, in that it is not the focus but rather a minor detail in the conversation. Although Delilah sees the need to tell these people, she does so in such a way that her sexuality is portrayed as just another aspect of her life. Similarly, in extract 58, Sarah rejects the need to openly tell even her friends about her sexuality

and, rather, allows them to “pick it up” from the way that she talks about women. Although these women do not openly disclose or confess their sexuality, they do appear to make conscious decisions to “slip it into conversation”. In this way, it is clear that lesbians continually have to manage their sexual identity and the disclosure of this identity in ways that heterosexual people do not.

When speakers draw on the repertoire of “normalisation”, they are able to construct their sexuality as something that they feel comfortable about, or as a normal part of who they are. When a speaker is seen to construct her sexuality as minor, she is required to explain why she chooses not to construct her sexuality as an integral part of her, and why she positions herself outside of the LGB community. Furthermore, when these women talk about “slipping it in”, they are able to construct their sexual identity as normal, and irrelevant, and encourage others to view it similarly. As is evident, this repertoire enables the participants to construct their sexual identities differently to how they would be portrayed through the use of the coming out canonical narrative. Although the participants can achieve some degree of “normalisation”, this is something that requires labour on the speaker’s part and has to be constantly negotiated and worked on in her everyday interactions with others. In the next section, other people’s acceptance of homosexuality shall be considered for how it is gained through “luck”.

7.3.2. Routinisation

Seidman (2004a) defines routinisation as other people’s acceptance and support of a person’s sexual identity, which can take place at the interpersonal and/or institutional level (see chapter three). This routinisation is evident in the participants’ talk around experiences of gaining acceptance from people they know and within the university environment. When considering the participants’ talk around routinisation, it becomes clear that, although these women have experienced the support and acceptance of others, this is not something that is taken for granted, but, rather, something that the speakers construct as a result of having “been lucky”.

Several of the participants draw on the repertoire of “routinisation” to construct the university as a “safe” and “supportive” place for lesbian students. This is shown in the extracts below.

Extract 59:

78. As: I just I did(!) settle down a little bit, knowing that (.1) it's more sort of accepted at (.1) at Rhodes here, so (.2) I dunno I felt more like safe(!).

Extract 60:

226. K: My department has always been very supportive. (.1) Um ja, so (.1) very supportive of like um, gay rights(!), of OUT(!)Rhodes of, you know? All the kind of, sort of active(!) voices on campus. Um (.3) as a university I've never felt (.2) I've never felt marginalised(!) for being (homo)sexual (.1) in the university context, let's say like academically(!).

Extract 61:

2.16. L: Well I mean Rhodes is very(!) different, ja (.1) I mean the fact that there's even a society(!) was (.1) quite amazing for me. You know like, people like Carrie who is in the position who (.1) I mean, I don't necessarily like(!) her very activist(!) feminist approach(!) to, to things necessarily, but the point is she's accepted and I think Rhodes is far(!) more openly, protected, and in that sense I, I realised for instance that, if I(!) had to lay an official complaint(!) (.1) the university wouldn't be able to ignore(!) it (.1) it would obviously (.1) shoot myself(!) in the foot, in terms of my career(!) but I do(!) know that the university's structures(!) is more protective of gay people even though there, there is um discrimination experienced, ja.

It is clear from Ashleigh's and Linda's comments that the university is constructed as being safe, because LGB students are made to feel "accepted" and that their sexuality is not an issue within the university context. Both Kate and Linda mention the existence of OUTRhodes as an indicator of this acceptance which Linda emphasises, having previously studied at a conservative Afrikaans university during apartheid. Kate speaks about how supportive her department is of "gay rights" and how her sexuality has never been treated as an issue, both within her department and the wider university context. Linda again highlights the university as a space of routinisation, by pointing out that there is even a prominent staff member who is lesbian and that she is "accepted" by the Rhodes community. Linda also acknowledges that, although "discrimination" still continues, students are provided with the means to lay complaints, which will be taken seriously by the university. By utilising this repertoire, participants can position themselves as safe, and supported by the university, regardless of the heterosexism that continues to mark South African society.

It is vital, however, to keep in mind that Rhodes is in the process of transformation; changes are continually being made in order to redress its past as a historically white university. Increasing the equality of all students, regardless of their race, gender or sexual orientation, is surfacing as an important goal for the university (see chapter one).

Extract 62:

2.178. K: Rhodes has always prided itself on being the liberal university. You know and on human rights and you know, on equality.

Kate constructs Rhodes as a “liberal” university, and an institutional space in which people’s equality is protected. She also talks about the university in terms of the changes that are currently being made within the university with regard to policies and practices that previously disadvantaged various groups of students (i.e., students who were not male, “white” or heterosexual). This could explain why some of the participants draw on the repertoire of “routinisation” when they talk about the specific context of Rhodes. Namely, Rhodes has been constructed as a context which provides a more accepting and safer space for lesbian students, compared to other parts of South Africa and even other universities.

There is a greater degree of freedom in the post-apartheid context of South Africa, particularly given the change in constitution (Reddy, 2009). This is apparent in the participants’ stories, as all of them describe situations in which they construct other people as behaving in supportive and accepting ways. This is shown by two of the participants in the next extracts, who describe friends at university or people around them who have accepted and supported them.

Extract 63:

58. C: I have yet(!) to have a friend be (.1) give me any negative reaction whatsoever.

Extract 64:

474. N: I was sitting in the common room one, one, one girl. I had(!) a movie and she wanted me to come watch it. (.1) Um, “The Devil Wears Prada”, something like that. (.1) So I was chilling there. [...] and then (.1) this one girl was like, “Hey, Neo, have you got a girl(!)friend yet?”. [...] But they actually fitted me into the conversation.

Extract 65:

2.62. Sa: My friends(!) were very open and they um, just very(!) liberal in terms of their beliefs(!) and you know, their thoughts(!) on sexuality. So (.1) whatever I was going through [...] so whatever I was going through I could always speak to them(!).

The repertoire of “routinisation” is particularly evident in Caroline’s narrative, in that she often refers to how her friends accepted her sexuality. This is shown in extract 63, when she constructs the acceptance of her friends as overwhelmingly positive. It is important, however, to keep in mind that Caroline is a “white” woman, who might be able to construct her narrative in positive ways, according to the privilege that is attached to this identity in South Africa. As shown in earlier extracts, many of the participants construct being lesbian as easier for “white” women than it is for “black” women. However, in extract 64, Neo, who is a “black” woman, draws on the repertoire of “routinisation” while describing a situation in her residence. Neo describes how she felt accepted when another girl treated her sexuality as normal. This routinisation is emphasised

by previous experiences that Neo talks about, when she has not “fitted in” to the conversation and has had to disclose her sexuality in order to avoid being considered heterosexual. This shows how the routinisation that Neo constructs in her account is facilitated by the context of her university residence. Acceptance is constructed as a form of support, when Sarah constructs all of her friends in extract 65 as supportive. She does this by describing how they helped her and provided her with information when she first came to identify as lesbian. In fact, Sarah gives this as her reason for not needing to join the LGB society, as discussed earlier. Although Sarah is seen to construct her sexuality as something which is silenced in her home life, Sarah is able to construct her friendships as particular relationships in which she can experience the acceptance of others. It is evident in these extracts that the participants construct routinisation as something that is contingent upon specific relationships and contexts.

When the participants utilise the repertoire of “routinisation”, they do not construct other people’s acceptance as something that can be taken for granted, but, rather, as something out of the ordinary. For instance, several participants describe themselves as having been “lucky”, particularly for the support and acceptance that they have received, and occasionally for the lack of heterosexism that they have faced.

Extract 66:

178. K: I think I’ve had it easier than most(!). I think I’m really(!) lucky that my parents have been so accepting.

Extract 67:

226. Sa: I think I’ve been incredibly(!) lucky actually, I’ve never really thought about it but I actually have been incredibly lucky.

Extract 68:

215. D: I think luckily (.1) I haven’t experienced a lot(!) of homophobia (.2) luckily like compared to some of the people I know (.1) I have (.1) a wonderful family and I’ve (.1) surrounded myself with friends who (.1) are cool like that and you know (.1) love me for me and not (.1) who I’m dating so (.1) so for me personally I, I’ve had it quite easy to be honest compared to (.1) some of the stories my friends can tell you.

In extract 66, Kate positions herself as having been lucky for having accepting parents. By comparing herself to others, she can construct this as something that is not experienced by all lesbians. Likewise, at the end of her first interview, Sarah positions herself as lucky after having reflected on her experiences through her narration. As discussed earlier, Sarah attributes this especially to the support she has received from her friends at university. Delilah uses the strategy of positioning herself as lucky when she talks about how accepting her family and friends have

been, and how she has not faced much heterosexism. Similar to Kate, Delilah compares her experiences with her friends, in order to justify how her experience is unusual and, therefore, not something to be taken for granted.

The participants frequently draw on the repertoire of “routinisation”, in order to highlight times when their sexuality has been accepted either within the specific context of Rhodes university or within their interpersonal relationships. It is evident that these women do not only experience heterosexism from others, but are also often made to feel as if their sexuality is normal or accepted. Although all of the participants draw on the repertoire of “routinisation” at points in their narratives, several participants construct other people’s acceptance as an experience which is out of the ordinary and an exception to the norm. This indicates that routinisation is constructed not as something that simply occurs, but, rather, as something that is achieved through luck. Therefore, this routinisation is contingent upon the context in which these women live and study, in that, considering other sectors of South African society, they are luckier than some.

The canonical narrative of normalisation facilitates the participants’ identity construction, in that it allows them to construct their sexuality as a normal, unproblematic, and even minor aspect of who they are. While drawing on this narrative, the participants are seen to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about being lesbian, namely, that one’s sexual identity is an integral part of who one is, and that the LGB community is inevitably a source of support within heteronormative society. Given that the coming out canonical narrative continues to prevail (see chapter six), speakers are, however, required to explain and defend their positions when they are seen to construct their sexual identities in ways that are alternative to the coming out narrative. The participants’ use of the canonical narrative of normalisation also indicates that typical experiences, such as being accepted by the LGB community, are not always applicable to lesbians living in the South African context, given that even the LGB society is shaped by previous racial divisions. As is evident in the participants’ use of the repertoire of “normalisation”, the construction of their sexuality as normal is not simply granted, but is achieved through lesbians’ constant identity work and negotiation.

Not only are speakers able to construct their sexuality as normal, by drawing on the canonical narrative of normalisation, but they can also position themselves as supported by their friends and

family, and part of a supportive university environment. The participants construct others as supportive by drawing on the repertoire of “routinisation”. Nevertheless, the way in which they describe this routinisation shows that these positive experiences are owing to the specific interpersonal relationships and the context in which the participants are located. This is highlighted, especially, in their talk around the university environment, which they construct as supportive, but contrast this with other contexts in South Africa where this acceptance may not be experienced. This indicates that heterosexism does still feature within South African society, but that lesbians may experience acceptance from others, depending on the social location. The participants’ use of this repertoire, and broader canonical narrative of normalisation, shows how lesbians cannot simply accept routinisation as a fact of life, instead, they are “lucky” when it happens. Therefore, these women are able to construct their sexual identities as normal, as well as construct others around them as accepting, but this needs to be acknowledged as achieved through an on-going process of identity management.

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter involved an analysis and discussion of lesbians’ stories of sexual identity, how their stories are shaped by heterosexism, and how lesbians can resist dominant ideologies and practices while negotiating their sexual identities within particular social frameworks. As I firstly highlighted, heterosexism is a social problem which continues to surface within lesbians’ everyday lives and interactions. The first section involved an explanation of how the participants speak about heterosexism, and how it can take on a variety of forms, depending on the social and interpersonal context in which it occurs. The participants are seen to construct the experience of being lesbian, and the threat of facing discrimination, as contingent upon how a lesbian’s sexual identity intersects with her other identity positions and the social and geographical space in which she is located. Furthermore, acts of heterosexism that the participants face are seen to be supported by prevailing relations of power, such as patriarchy and heteronormativity. In turn, heterosexism reproduces these dominant ideologies and practices. This leads to the second section, in which the participants are seen to resist and challenge heteronormative assumptions in the ways that they utilise rhetorical strategies of resistance in their talk. Therefore, the participants are not only restricted by heterosexism, but are provided opportunities when they can challenge heterosexism and, thus, take up positions of power. Resistance is also achieved by the participants through their decisions of (non)disclosure. At times, they may choose to disclose their sexuality to

others in order to challenge heteronormative beliefs or assumptions, while at other times they might not disclose their sexual identity, owing to the negative ramifications this would have on a specific relationship. Hence, these women are seen to contest the “will to truth” and the imperative that is placed on lesbians, in the coming out canonical narrative, to disclose their sexuality to everyone with the promise of increased self-awareness and improved relationships. Furthermore, by taking the heterosexist context into account, when considering lesbians’ decisions of non-disclosure, one can see that any decisions that these women make to not disclose are strategic responses to potentially harmful consequences, rather than personal failures in development and self-acceptance. In the third section of this chapter, I discussed how the participants have started to use an alternative narrative to story their sexual identities, namely, the canonical narrative of normalisation. When the participants use this narrative, they construct their sexual identities as normal or even unimportant, which, again, shows their move away from using the coming out canonical narrative. However, this sense of normalisation is something that requires a speaker to engage in constant labour to maintain, that she continually has to re-establish this construction in her identity work, given the everyday reality of heterosexism. When the participants describe the acceptance and support that they have received, it is clear that this acceptance is not something that they take for granted, but, rather, something that they see as a result of having been lucky. Therefore, lesbians’ identities should be considered for how they are shaped by heterosexism, how their identities are located within specific socio-cultural locations, and how, as a result, lesbians actively negotiate their sexual identities within these conditions. When identity construction is examined in this way, one can see how lesbians’ sexual identities are not simply products of a developmental process, but are multiple and complex entities that are contested and negotiated in an on-going process of identity management. The nuances of these lesbians’ identity construction and negotiation, as it occurs within a historically white university in South Africa, cannot, therefore, be captured by the coming out canonical narrative.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

8.1. Review of the findings

The aim of this study was to consider how lesbians' sexual identities are discursively constituted and negotiated within a specific socio-historical framework, namely, within the context of a historically white university in South Africa. This involved analysing lesbians' identity construction both on a micro- (everyday, interpersonal) level and on a macro- (institutional) level. As I have argued, such an analysis is afforded by incorporating Taylor and Littleton's (2006) narrative-discursive approach with Foucault's (1978/1990) analytics of power. Throughout this thesis, I have questioned whether the western canonical narrative of coming out is useful or applicable to understanding lesbians' identity construction as it occurs within post-apartheid South Africa. In this final chapter, I shall conclude that although the coming out story can have productive effects on lesbians' identity work, it does not account for the way in which lesbians in this particular context are involved in an on-going process of sexual identity management.

8.1.1. "Coming out": shaping lesbian subjectivity

Homosexual identities have been constructed as "abnormal" for a considerable amount of time in modern society, while heterosexuality has been privileged as the norm (Foucault, 1978/1990). However, lesbian (and gay) identities have been rearticulated in positive ways, particularly through theories of gay and lesbian identity development, or, coming out models. The process of "coming out" signals a person's move away from feelings of shame towards acquiring a positive and coherent (homo)sexual identity. Similarly, the coming out story has provided lesbians with a life story that is celebratory and that differs from the heterosexual canonical narrative (Cohler & Hammack, 2006). Through its repeated use, in academic, political, and everyday life, it has been constructed as a familiar story of the "struggle and success" of acquiring a lesbian identity (Hammack & Cohler, 2009, p. 4). These coming out theories and the coming out story have clearly been founded on, and have reproduced, a certain way of understanding lesbian (and gay) subjectivity.

The coming out story has become an effective counternarrative to heteronormativity (Bacon, 1998), as it enables the articulation of lesbian identities, which would otherwise be silenced within

the confines of heterosexist society. This story of “struggle and success” has proven to be an effective form of resistance against heteronormativity, as it highlights the difficulties that lesbians have to face within society, and the courage and willpower that they use to take on non-normative sexual identities (Hammack & Cohler, 2009). Although heterosexuality has been constructed as the norm within society, alternative sexual identities and life experiences have developed through the repeated use of the coming out story. This has allowed lesbians to tell stories that depict their own lives more closely than the heterosexual canonical narrative ever could (Blackburn, 2009). For this reason, the coming out story has developed as a successful counternarrative to heteronormativity.

It is clear within this study that the coming out story does shape these women’s personal stories of sexual identity to some extent. For example, most of the participants utilise particular interpretative repertoires which make up the canonical narrative of coming out. These repertoires include those of “distress and loneliness”, “supportive gay community”, and “realisation”. This canonical narrative provides speakers with a familiar way of storying their sexual identities. Furthermore, speakers can position themselves in positive ways, as “acceptable (that is, coherent) narrative selves” and, thus, recognisable lesbian subjects (Wood, 1999, as cited in Blackburn, 2009, p. 135).

The drive for narrative and identity coherence is a western phenomenon (Gergen, 1994; Taylor & Littleton, 2006), which is reflected in the coming out canonical narrative. This narrative provides the resources to create a sense of coherence in a lesbian’s personal narrative and in the construction of her identity. Through the use of this discursive resource, a lesbian can order her own narrative in a logical way and construct her sexual identity as positive and secure. However, it is important to keep in mind that, from a narrative-discursive perspective, identity coherence is never given; rather, it is continually re-negotiated within a person’s biographical talk (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Furthermore, given that this is a western conception of storytelling and sexual identity, it does not necessarily apply to lesbians’ stories of sexual identity in other contexts.

Not only has the telling of one’s coming out story been constructed as an integral part of gay and lesbian life, but so has the disclosure of one’s sexual identity, or “confession”, as Foucault (1978/1990) terms it. The “truth” of one’s sexual identity has been constructed through the

institution of psychology and by coming out theorists, such as Cass (1979), as something that a person needs to recognise and acknowledge to others. This “will to truth” is evident in the imperative that has been placed on lesbians and gay men to “confess” their sexuality to others, who are deemed understanding. In addition, the person is promised the experience of a sense of relief for having told the truth, as well as a greater self-awareness. Therefore, disclosure has been constructed as vital and indicative of how a person has embraced the truth of her sexual identity.

It is important to recognise that lesbians are, in fact, always located within a particular network of power relations. A lesbian’s decision to confess her sexuality to another person, therefore, should be read as indicative of the relations of power, such as heteronormativity, that surround and circulate within her identity construction. These relations of power, furthermore, compel a lesbian to regulate her sexuality in certain ways. Concomitantly, as long as heteronormativity continues to permeate social structures and interactions, lesbians will feel obliged to “confess” their sexual identity to others, while heterosexual people will be exempt from this practice. Furthermore, the obligatory element of confession has been obscured by the way in which confession has been constructed as a beneficial practice. In the coming out story, confession has been constructed as an integral part of lesbian identity formation; yet, it is this very practice that serves to entrench heteronormative power.

8.1.2. Restrictions on lesbian subjectivity and storytelling

Given its extensive use within political, therapeutic, lay, and academic fields, the coming out story has undoubtedly become a canonical narrative for lesbians’ stories of sexual identity (Bacon, 1998; Hammack & Cohler, 2009; Plummer, 1995). However, through this narrative, ways of speaking about and experiencing one’s lesbian identity have become predictable and rigid. This has meant that when a speaker utilises this narrative, she is restricted in the way that she can construct her sexual identity as a coherent and authentic entity.

This canonical narrative represents a western conception of what it means for a lesbian to develop a sexual identity, and reflects how homosexual identities were understood in a specific socio-historical location, that is, around the time of the American lesbian and gay liberation movement in the 1970s. In addition, the focus is placed on the individual in this story (or developmental theory), and how she comes to acquire a positive (homo)sexual identity. As a result, when a

lesbian talks about “coming out”, or draws on the coming out story, she is required to describe her experience of slowly uncovering her sexual identity through a series of developmental milestones and reaching a stage where her identity is a positive, coherent whole, which is visible to others. This constructs a lesbian’s sexual identity as a product of a developmental process. However, with this focus on the individual, the surrounding context in which a lesbian develops her sexual identity is ignored.

Within this study, the participants’ identity work was analysed for how it is firmly located within the specific socio-cultural context of a historically white university in South Africa. It is evident within the participants’ narratives that heteronormative and patriarchal relations of power continue to shape the university environment and the wider South African context. Heterosexuality, in particular, has been constructed and reproduced as the norm through heterosexist practices and policies within these contexts. This is shown in the participants’ narratives, when they describe moments when their sexual identities have been denied, denigrated, or have positioned them as open to physical and sexual violence. Heterosexism takes a variety of forms and, within the context of South Africa, it is shaped along racial and social divisions. For this reason, the participants construct the experience of being lesbian as contingent upon how this identity intersects with one’s racial, cultural and other identities and the socio-geographical location in which a lesbian finds herself at any point.

Given that the university institution can form the nexus of personal, racial and social struggles, it is useful to consider lesbians’ experiences within the university, and especially within this particular historically white university. It is evident that the participants experience their sexual identities quite differently to each other, based on how their multiple identities intersect with their location in this context. In other words, while some of the “white” participants construct the LGB student society as a positive and accepting space, several of the “black” participants construct this community as unhelpful, and highlight the way in which it perpetuates the racial divisions of South African society. Nevertheless, owing to the process of transformation that Rhodes University is undergoing, there are policies and practices which construct a framework of support for LGB students. For instance, some of the participants recognise that they still face heterosexism, but that they have the means to formally contest this, which is enabled through the university’s policies against discrimination. With its sole focus on a person’s sexual identity, it is

clear that the coming out story cannot account for the variation of the participants' experiences and the multiplicity of their identities.

The participants are seen to draw on narratives other than the canonical narrative of coming out in their personal stories of sexual identity. While doing so, they are able to challenge the ways in which they are expected to experience heterosexism and its effects on their own sexual identities, by drawing on strategies of resistance. This involves the participants talking about the ways in which they have responded to heterosexism through actions such as consciousness-raising, or taking power through retaliation, which enable them to adopt positions of power.

The participants show resistance in the way that they challenge the practice of "confession". As many of the participants explain, the disclosure of their sexual identities is not always beneficial or necessary in particular moments and within specific relationships. Given that confession has become a normative practice, however, the participants are required to defend their decisions of non-disclosure. Nevertheless, they are able to do so by grounding the decision in the interpersonal or social context, and explaining why disclosure would be harmful to a relationship or to them personally. It is evident in the participants' decisions of non-disclosure and how they negotiate disclosure within the confines of heterosexist conditions, that a lesbian's identity is complex and repeatedly contested.

As shown in the participants' narratives, these women exercised their agency by deciding not to tell others, after assessing the negative ramifications, or heterosexism, that they may face. Therefore, the decisions around disclosure that these women talk about are not necessarily based on the need to be "out the closet", but rather result from a strategic decision-making process that regards how disclosure, or the lack thereof, will impact positively and negatively on certain relationships and aspects of their lives. This highlights the agency that lesbians have in their identity construction, and how there are opportunities for them to resist normative practices and relations of power.

An alternative narrative to the coming out canonical narrative has started to emerge in the form of the canonical narrative of normalisation. The participants appear to use this narrative when they construct their sexual identities as "normal", minor, or unproblematic in their lives. This sense of

normalisation is portrayed by the participants when they speak about “slipping” their sexual identities into conversations. Hence, they do not overtly disclose their sexual identities, but treat this information as no more significant than heterosexual people’s romantic or sexual lives. However, this requires constant labour on the speaker’s part, in that she continually has to work at producing her sexual identity as normal in her identity work and in her everyday interactions.

The canonical narrative of normalisation additionally resources the participants’ talk around how other people show acceptance, or “routinisation”, of their sexual identities. For instance, the participants talk about receiving support from others both within certain interpersonal relationships and in the context of Rhodes University. This is not, however, an experience which is taken for granted by the participants. Instead, they construct this as the result of having “been lucky” to have received support from others. In addition, they position this acceptance as contingent upon the specific relationships and contexts in which they experienced it. This calls attention to how a lesbian’s experience of her sexuality as “normal” is never secure in the South African context, just as the support she receives is simply a case of having been lucky.

8.2. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

Given that this research is qualitative, and based on a small sample population, the findings cannot possibly account for the experiences or life stories of all lesbians in South Africa. Instead, this study should be considered exploratory in nature, as it provides insight into how a few lesbians within a historically white university construct their sexual identities through biographical talk. This vein of inquiry, as I have argued, allows one to gain a rich understanding of the discursive construction of sexual identities, while still reflecting speakers’ active negotiation in this exercise. This is possibly the only study in South Africa in which the sexual storytelling of lesbians has been analysed from a narrative perspective, and further research is therefore highly recommended.

Although the participants in this study come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, they do share the privilege of receiving tertiary education. Therefore, it would be useful to conduct similar studies within other sectors of South African society, so as to explore the ways in which identity construction is shaped by practices and relations of power that circulate in those contexts. Furthermore, it would be interesting to consider lesbians’ sexual storytelling within the context of a historically black university, in order to consider how this type of institution shapes the

construction of lesbians' sexual identities, and whether, or how, this differs from that of a historically white university.

8.3. Concluding remarks

I have shown how the coming out story and the discourse of "coming out" has shaped knowledge about lesbian subjectivity. From this perspective, a lesbian's identity has been constructed as an enduring "true" part of who she is, which she is able to uncover through a developmental process of "coming out". However, the narrative of coming out, which implies a unidirectional movement of stepping out of the closet, does not adequately account for lesbians' strategic decisions of (non)disclosure and their identity construction. This is, furthermore, a western narrative which emerged during a specific historical moment, and cannot simply be applied to understand lesbians' identity work that takes place in a different socio-historical time, such as in post-apartheid South Africa. Instead, the lesbians who participated in this study were considered for how they are involved in a constant process of sexual identity management, which is necessitated by the heteronormative and patriarchal relations of power that circulate in various contexts of their lives. Therefore, these lesbians' identities are not fixed products of a developmental process, but are perpetually changing and contingent upon the discursive and social conditions in which these women are located.

Reference List:

- Abes, E. S., & Jones, S. R. (2004). Meaning-making capacity and the dynamics of lesbian college students' multiple dimensions of identity. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(6), 612-632.
- Andrews, M., Day Sclater, S., Squire, C., & Tamboukou, M. (2004). Narrative research. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 109-123). London: Sage.
- Arndt, M., & de Bruin, G. (2006). Attitudes towards lesbians and gay men: Relations with gender, race and religion among university students. *PINS*, 33, 16-30.
- Artz, L. (2009). The weather watchers: Gender, violence and social control. In M. Steyn, & M. van Zyl (Eds.), *The prize and the price: Shaping sexualities in South Africa* (pp. 169-191). Cape Town: HSRC.
- Bacon, J. (1998). Getting the story straight: Coming out narratives and the possibility of a cultural rhetoric. *World Englishes*, 17(2), 249-258.
- Bamberg, M. (2004a). Narrative discourse and identities. In J. C. Meister, T. Kindt, W. Schernus, & M. Stein (Eds.), *Narratology beyond literary criticism* (pp. 213-237). New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Bamberg, M. (2004b). "I know it may sound mean to say this, but we couldn't really care less about her anyway": Form and functions of "slut bashing" in male identity constructions in 15-year-olds. *Human Development*, 47, 331-353.
- Baraka, N., & Morgan, R. (2005). "I want to marry the woman of my choice without fear of being stoned": Female marriages and bisexual women in Kenya. In R. Morgan, & S. Wieringa (Eds.), *Tommy boys, lesbian and ancestral wives: Female same-sex practices in Africa* (pp. 25-50). Johannesburg: Jacana.
- Berman, K. (1993). Lesbians in South Africa: challenging the invisibility. In M. Krouse, & K. Berman (Eds.), *The Invisible ghetto: Lesbian and gay writing from South Africa* (pp. xvii-xxi). Johannesburg: COSAW.
- Blackburn, M. V. (2009). Narrative identity construction of black youth for a social change. In P. L. Hammack, & B. J. Cohler (Eds.), *The story of sexual identity: Narrative perspectives on the gay and lesbian life course* (pp. 131-154). New York: Oxford.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2008). Ethics in qualitative research. In C. Willig, & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 263-279). London: Sage.

- Britton, H. (2006). Organising against gender violence in South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32(1), 145-163.
- Bruner, J. (1987). Life as narrative. *Social Research*, 54, 11-32.
- Burman, E., Kottler, A., Levett, A., & Parker, I. (1997). Power and discourse: Culture and change in South Africa. In A. Levett, A. Kottler, E. Burman, & I. Parker (Eds.), *Culture, power and difference: Discourse analysis in South Africa* (pp. 1-13). London: Zed Books.
- Butler, A. H. (2007). Navigating institutional homophobia: A challenge for South African social work with gay and lesbian youth. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services*, 19(1), 71-88.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1997). Imitation and gender insubordination. In L. Nicholson (Ed.), *The second wave* (pp. 300-315). New York: Routledge.
- Cass, V. C. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 4(3), 219-235.
- Cass, V. C. (1996). Sexual orientation identity formation: A western phenomenon. In R. P. Cabaj, & T. S. Stein (Eds.), *Textbook of homosexuality and mental health* (pp. 227-251). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric.
- Chase, S. E. (2001). Universities as discursive environments for sexual identity construction. In J. F. Gubrium, & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Institutional selves: Troubled identities in a post-modern world* (pp. 142-157). New York: Oxford.
- Chase, S. E. (2005). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches, voices. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 651-679). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Chetty, D. (1994). A drag at Madame Costello's: Cape moffie life and the popular press in the 1950s and 1960s. In M. Gevisser, & E. Cameron (Eds.), *Defiant desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa* (pp. 115-127). Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Christiansen, E.C. (2000). Ending the Apartheid of the closet: Sexual orientation in the South African constitutional process. *NYU Journal of International Politics*, 997, 1-36.
- Clarke, C. (2005, Fall). Deconstructing "the down low" – People of color "coming out" and "being out" on campus: A Conversation with Mark Brimhall-Vargas, Sivagami Subbaraman, and Robert Waters. *Multicultural Education*, 45-59.
- Clarke, V., & Turner, K. (2007). Clothes maketh the queer? Dress, appearance and the construction of lesbian, gay and bisexual identities. *Feminism Psychology*, 17(2), 267-276.

- Cock, J. (2003). Engendering gay and lesbian rights: The equality clause in the South African constitution. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 26(1), 35-45.
- Cohen, K. M., & Savin-Williams, R. C. (1996). Developmental perspectives on coming out to self and others. In R. C. Savin-Williams, & K. M. Cohen (Eds.), *The lives of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals: Children to adults* (pp. 111-144). Florida: Harcourt Brace.
- Cohler, B. J., & Hammack, P. L. (2006). Making a gay identity: Life story and the construction of a coherent self. In D. P. McAdams, R. Josselson, & A. Lieblich (Eds.), *Identity and story: Creating self in narrative* (pp. 151-172). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Cohler, B. J., & Hammack, P. L. (2007). The psychological world of the gay teenager: Social change, narrative, and "normality". *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 36, 47-59.
- Cohler, B. J., & Hammack, P. L. (2009). Lives, times, and narrative engagement: Multiplicity and meaning in sexual lives. In P. L. Hammack, & B. J. Cohler (Eds.), *The story of sexual identity: Narrative perspectives on the gay and lesbian life course* (pp. 453-465). New York: Oxford.
- Coleman, E. (1982). Developmental stages of the coming out process. In J. Gonsiorek (Ed.), *Homosexuality and psychotherapy: A practitioner's handbook of affirmative models* (pp. 31-44). New York: Haworth.
- Crawley, S. L. (2009). When coming out is redundant: On the difficulties of remaining queer and a theorist after coming out in the classroom. *Feminism and Psychology*, 19(2), 210-215.
- Crossley, M. L. (2003). Formulating narrative psychology: The limitations of contemporary social constructionism. *Narrative Inquiry*, 13(2), 287-300.
- Croucher, S. (2002). South Africa's democratisation and the politics of gay liberation. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 28(2), 315-330.
- D'Augelli, A. R. (1996). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual development during adolescence and young adulthood. In R. P. Cabaj, & T. S. Stein (Eds.), *Textbook of homosexuality and mental health* (pp. 267-288). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1999). Positioning and personhood. In R. Harré, & L. van Langenhove (Eds.), *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action* (pp. 32-52). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Day Sclater, S. (2003). What is the subject? *Narrative Inquiry*, 13(2), 317-330.
- Dempsey, C. L. (1994). Health and social issues of gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents. *Families in Society*, 75(3), 160-167.

- Diamond, L. M. (2008). *Sexual fluidity: Understanding women's love and desire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.
- Edley, N. (2001). Analysing masculinity: Interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse as data: A guide for analysis* (pp. 189-228). London: Sage.
- Eliason, M. J. (1996). Identity formation for lesbian, bisexual, and gay persons: Beyond a "minoritising" view. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 30(3), 31-58.
- Evans, N. J., & Broido, E. M. (1999). Coming out in college residence halls: Negotiation, meaning making, challenges, supports. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(6), 658-668.
- Evans, N. J., & D'Augelli, A. R. (1996). Lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people in college. In K. M. Cohen, & R. C. Savin-Williams (Eds.), *The lives of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals: Children to adults* (pp. 201-226). Florida: Harcourt Brace.
- Eves, A. (2004). Queer theory, butch/femme identities and lesbian space. *Sexualities*, 7(4), 480-496.
- Farquhar, C. (2000). "Lesbian" in a post-lesbian world? Policing identity, sex and image. *Sexualities*, 3, 219-236.
- Fenske, J. (2004). *Fact sheet: Poverty in South Africa*. Retrieved May 4, 2010, from <http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0000990/>
- Floyd, F. J., & Stein, T. S. (2002). Sexual orientation identity formation among gay, lesbian, and bisexual youths: Multiple patterns of milestone experiences. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 12(2), 167-191.
- Ford, V. E. (2003). Coming out as lesbian or gay: A potential precipitant of crisis in adolescence. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 8(2/3), 93-110.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1978/1990). *The history of sexuality: Volume 1: An introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1980a). The history of sexuality. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977* (pp. 183-193). New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1980b). Two lectures. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977* (pp. 78-108). New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1980c). The eye of power. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977* (pp. 146-165). New York: Pantheon.

- Fraser, H. (2004). Doing narrative research: Analysing personal stories line by line. *Qualitative Social Work*, 3, 179-201.
- Freeman, M. (2003). Identity and difference in narrative inquiry: A commentary on the articles by Erica Burman, Michelle Crossley, Ian Parker, and Shelley Day Sclater. *Narrative Inquiry*, 13(2), 331-346.
- Fuss, D. (1991). Inside/out. In D. Fuss (Ed.), *Inside/out: Lesbian theories, gay theories* (pp. 1-10). London: Routledge.
- Gamson, J. (2003). Sexualities, queer theory, and qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 540-568). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Geiger, W., Harwood, J., & Hummert, M. L. (2006). College students' multiple stereotypes of lesbians: A cognitive perspective. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 51(3), 165-182.
- Gergen, K. J. (1994). *Realities and relationships: Soundings in social construction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.
- Gergen, M. M. (2004). Once upon a time: A narratologist's tale. In C. Daiute, & C. Lightfoot (Eds.), *Narrative analysis: Studying the development of individuals in society* (pp. 267-285). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gergen, M. M. (2008). Qualitative methods in feminist psychology. In C. Willig, & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 280-295). London: Sage.
- Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. M. (1986). Narrative form and the construction of psychological science. In T. R. Sarbin (Ed.), *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct* (pp. 22-44). New York: Praeger.
- Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. M. (2006). Narratives in action. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 112-121.
- Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. M. (2007). Social construction and research methodology. In W. Outhwaite, & S. P. Turner (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of social science methodology* (pp. 461-478). London: Sage.
- Gevisser, M. (1994). A different fight for freedom: a history of South African lesbian and gay organisation from the 1950s to 1990s. In M. Gevisser, & E. Cameron (Eds.), *Defiant desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa* (pp. 14-86). Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Gevisser, M., & Cameron, E. (1994). Introduction. In M. Gevisser, & E. Cameron (Eds.), *Defiant desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa* (pp. 3-13). Johannesburg: Ravan.

- Gonsiorek, J. C. (1996). Mental health and sexual orientation. In R. C. Savin-Williams, & K. M. Cohen (Eds.), *The lives of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals: Children to adults* (pp. 462-476). Florida: Harcourt Brace.
- Gorman-Murray, A. (2008). Queering the family home: Narratives from gay, lesbian and bisexual youth coming out in supportive family homes in Australia. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 15(1), 31-44.
- Graziano, K. J. (2004a). Oppression and resiliency in a post-apartheid South Africa: Unheard voices of black gay men and lesbians. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 10(3), 302-316.
- Graziano, K. J. (2004b). Coming out on a South African university campus: Adaptations of gay men and lesbians. *Society in Transition*, 35(2), 273-286.
- Greene, B. (1994). Lesbian and gay sexual orientations: Implications for clinical training, practice, and research. In B. Greene, & G. M. Herek (Eds.), *Psychological perspectives on lesbian and gay issues: Vol. 1. Lesbian and gay psychology: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (pp. 1-24). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gubrium, E., & Koro-Ljungberg, M. (2005). Contending with border making in the social constructionist interview. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11, 689-715.
- Hallowell, N., Lawton, J., & Gregory, S. (2005). Self. In N. Hallowell, J. Lawton, & S. Gregory (Eds.), *Reflections on Research* (pp. 42-70). Maidenhead: Open University.
- Halpin, S. A., & Allen, M.W. (2004). Change in psycho-social well-being during stages of gay identity development. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 47(2), 109-126.
- Hames, M. (2007). Sexual identity and transformation at a South African university. *Social Dynamics*, 33(1), 52-77.
- Hammack, P. L., & Cohler, B. J. (2009). Narrative engagement and stories of sexual identity: An interdisciplinary approach to the study of sexual lives. In P. L. Hammack, & B. J. Cohler (Eds.), *The story of sexual identity: Narrative perspectives on the gay and lesbian life course* (pp. 3-22). New York: Oxford.
- Harper, G. W., Jernewell, N., & Zea, M. C. (2004). Giving voice to emerging science and theory for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people of color. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 10(3), 187-199.
- Harry, J. (1993). Being out: A general model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 26(1), 25-39.
- Herek, G. M. (1996). Heterosexism and homophobia. In R. P. Cabaj, & T. S. Stein (Eds.), *Textbook of homosexuality and mental health* (pp. 101-113). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric.

- Hetrick, E. S., & Martin, A. D. (1987). Developmental issues and their resolution for gay and lesbian adolescents. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 14(1/2), 25-43.
- Hoad, N. (2005). Introduction. In N. Hoad, K. Martin, & G. Reid (Eds.), *Sex and politics in South Africa* (pp. 14-25). Cape Town: Double Storey Books.
- Hole, R. (2007). Working between languages and cultures: Issues of representation, voice, and authority intensified. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13, 696-710.
- Horn, J. (2006). Re-righting the sexual body. *Feminist Africa*, 6, 7-19.
- Isaacks, M., & Morgan, R. (2005). "I don't force my feelings for other women, my feelings have to force me": Same-sexuality amongst Ovambo women in Namibia. In R. Morgan, & S. Wieringa (Eds.), *Tommy boys, lesbian and ancestral wives: Female same-sex practices in Africa* (pp. 77-120). Johannesburg: Jacana.
- Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer theory: An introduction*. Melbourne: Melbourne University.
- Johns, D. J., & Probst, T. M. (2004). Sexual minority identity formation in an adult population. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 47(2), 81-90.
- Johnston, L. B., & Jenkins, D. (2004). Coming out in mid-adulthood: Building a new identity. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 16(2), 19-42.
- Jootun, D., & McGhee, G. (2009). Reflexivity: Promoting rigour in qualitative research. *Nursing Standard*, 23(23), 42-46.
- Jordan, K. M., & Deluty, R. H. (1998). Coming out for lesbian women: Its relation to anxiety, positive affectivity, self-esteem, and social support. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 35(2), 41-63.
- Judge, M., Manion, A., & de Waal, S. (2008). Introduction. In M. Judge, A. Manion, & S. de Waal (Eds.), *To have and to hold: The making of same-sex marriage in South Africa* (pp. 1-14). Auckland Park: Fanele.
- Kelly, K. (2006a). Calling it a day: Reaching conclusions in qualitative research. In M. Terre Blanche, K. Durrheim, & D. Painter (Eds.), *Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences* (pp. 370-387). Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- Kelly, K. (2006b). From encounter to text: Collecting data in qualitative research. In M. Terre Blanche, K. Durrheim, & D. Painter (Eds.), *Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences* (pp. 286-319). Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- Kheswa, B., & Wieringa, S. (2005). "My attitude is manly... a girl needs to walk on the aisle": Butch-femme subculture in Johannesburg, South Africa. In R. Morgan, & S. Wieringa (Eds.), *Tommy boys, lesbian and ancestral wives: Female same-sex practices in Africa* (pp. 199-229). Johannesburg: Jacana.

- Khumalo, S., & Wieringa, S. (2005). "I'm the black sheep of my family...": Same-sexuality in the corners of Swaziland. In R. Morgan, & S. Wieringa (Eds.), *Tommy boys, lesbian and ancestral wives: Female same-sex practices in Africa* (pp. 261-278). Johannesburg: Jacana.
- Kitzinger, C. (1987). *The social construction of lesbianism*. London: Sage.
- Kitzinger, C. (2005). Heteronormativity in action: Reproducing the heterosexual nuclear family in after-hours medical calls. *Social Problems*, 52(4), 477-498.
- Kitzinger, C., & Coyle, A. (2002). Introducing lesbian and gay psychology. In A. Coyle, & C. Kitzinger (Eds.), *Lesbian and gay psychology: New perspectives* (pp. 1-29). Oxford: BPS Blackwell.
- Kitzinger, C., & Wilkinson, S. (1995). Transitions from heterosexuality to lesbianism: The discursive production of lesbian identities. *Developmental Psychology*, 31(1), 95-104.
- Klein, F., Sepekoff, B., & Wolf, T. J. (1985). Sexual orientation: A multi-variable dynamic process. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 11(1-2), 35-49.
- Kleinbooi, H. (1994). Identity crossfire: On being a black gay student activist. In M. Gevisser, & E. Cameron (Eds.), *Defiant desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa* (pp. 264-268). Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Kvale, S. (2007). Doing interviews. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The Sage qualitative research kit*. London: Sage.
- Land, V., & Kitzinger, C. (2005). Speaking as a lesbian: Correcting the heterosexist presumption. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 38(4), 371-416.
- Lewis, D. (2003). Editorial. *Feminist Africa*, 2, 1-7.
- Lewis, J., & Loots, F. (1994). "Moffies en manvroue": Gay and lesbian life histories in contemporary Cape Town. In M. Gevisser, & E. Cameron (Eds.), *Defiant desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa* (pp. 140-157). Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Little, J. N. (2001). Embracing gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered youth in school-based settings. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 30(2), 99-110.
- Macleod, C. (1999). *"The governmentality of teenage pregnancy": Scientific literature and professional practice in South Africa*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Natal, South Africa.
- Macleod, C. (2002). Deconstructive discourse analysis: Extending the methodological conversation. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 32(1), 17-24.

- Macleod, C., & Durrheim, K. (2002). Foucauldian feminism: The implications of governmentality. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 32(1), 41-60.
- Markowe, L. A. (2002). Coming out as lesbian. In A. Coyle, & C. Kitzinger (Eds.), *Lesbian and gay psychology: New perspectives* (pp. 63-80). Oxford: BPS Blackwell.
- Mauthner, N. S., & Doucet, A. (2003). Reflexive accounts and accounts of reflexivity in qualitative data analysis. *Sociology*, 37(3), 413-431.
- McAdams, D. P. (1993). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self*. New York: Guilford.
- McCarn, S. R., & Fassinger, R. E. (1996). Revisioning sexual minority identity formation: A new model of lesbian identity and its implications for counseling and research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 24(3), 508-534.
- McCormack, C. (2004). Storying stories: A narrative approach to in-depth interview conversations. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7(3), 219-236.
- McNay, L. (1994). *Foucault: A critical introduction*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Minton, H. L., & McDonald, G. J. (1984). Homosexual identity formation as a developmental process. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 9, 91-104.
- Mishler, E. G. (1986). *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.
- Moffett, H. (2006). "These women, they force us to rape them": Rape as narrative of social control in post-apartheid South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32(1), 129-144.
- Mohamed, S. M., & Wieringa, S. (2005). "Immoral and satanic": Loving secretly in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. In R. Morgan, & S. Wieringa (Eds.), *Tommy boys, lesbian and ancestral wives: Female same-sex practices in Africa* (pp. 53-75). Johannesburg: Jacana.
- Mooney-Somers, J., & Ussher, J. (2000). Young lesbians and mental health: The closet is a depressing place to be. In J. Ussher (Ed.), *Women's health: Contemporary international perspectives* (pp. 83-92). Leicester: BPS.
- Morgan, R., & Wieringa, S. (2005). Introduction. In R. Morgan, & S. Wieringa (Eds.), *Tommy boys, lesbian and ancestral wives: Female same-sex practices in Africa* (pp. 11-22). Johannesburg: Jacana.
- Morris, J. F. (1997). Lesbian coming out as a multidimensional process. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 33(2), 1-22.

- Mosher, C. M. (2001). The social implications of sexual identity formation and the coming-out process: A review of the theoretical and empirical literature. *The Family Journal*, 9, 164-173.
- Murray, S. O. (1998). Sexual politics in contemporary Southern Africa. In S. O. Murray, & W. Roscoe (Eds.), *Boy-wives and female husbands: Studies of African homosexualities* (pp. 243-254). London: Macmillan.
- Nagadya, M., & Morgan, R. (2005). "Some say I am hermaphrodite just because I put trousers": Lesbians and tommy boys in Kampala, Uganda. In R. Morgan, & S. Wieringa (Eds.), *Tommy boys, lesbian and ancestral wives: Female same-sex practices in Africa* (pp. 65-75). Johannesburg: Jacana.
- Nesmith, A. A., Burton, D. L., & Cosgrove, T. J. (1999). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth and young adults: Social support in their own words. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 37(1), 95-108.
- Nkabinde, N., & Morgan, R. (2005). "This has happened since ancient times... it's something you are born with": Ancestral wives amongst same-sex sangomas in South Africa. In R. Morgan, & S. Wieringa (Eds.), *Tommy boys, lesbian and ancestral wives: Female same-sex practices in Africa* (pp. 231-258). Johannesburg: Jacana.
- Olesen, V. L. (2003). Feminisms and qualitative research at and into the millennium. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 332-397). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Oliver, D. G., Serovich, J. M., & Mason, T. L. (2005). Constraints and opportunities with interview transcription: Towards reflection in qualitative research. *Social Forces*, 84(2), 1273-1289.
- Oswald, R. F. (2000). Family and friendship relationships after young women come out as bisexual or lesbian. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 38(3), 65-83.
- Painter, D., & Theron, W. H. (2001). Heading south! Importing discourse analysis. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 31(1), 1-8.
- Parker, I. (2005). *Qualitative psychology: Introducing radical research*. Maidenhead: Open University.
- Phelan, S. (1993). (Be)coming out: Lesbian identity and politics. *Signs*, 18(4), 765-790.
- Pilkington, N. W., & D'Augelli, A. R. (1995). Victimization of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth in community settings. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 23, 34-56.
- Pinnegar, S., & Daynes, J. G. (2007). Locating narrative inquiry historically. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 3-34). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling sexual stories: Power, change and social worlds*. London: Routledge.
- Potgieter, C. (1997). *Black, South African, lesbian: Discourses of invisible lives*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London: Sage.
- Ratele, K. (2006). Ruling masculinity and sexuality. *Feminist Africa*, 6, 48-64.
- Ratele, K. (2009). Apartheid, anti-apartheid and post-apartheid sexualities. In M. Steyn, & M. van Zyl (Eds.), *The prize and the price: Shaping sexualities in South Africa* (pp. 290-305). Cape Town: HSRC.
- Remafedi, G. (1987). Adolescent homosexuality: Psychosocial and medical implications. *Pediatrics*, 79(3), 331-337.
- Reddy, V. (2002). Perverts and sodomites: homophobia as hate speech in Africa. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 20, 163-175.
- Reddy, V. (2009). Queer marriage: Sexualising citizenship and the development of freedoms in South Africa. In M. Steyn, & M. van Zyl (Eds.), *The prize and the price: Shaping sexualities in South Africa* (pp. 341-363). Cape Town: HSRC.
- Reid, G. (2010). The canary of the constitution: Same-sex equality in the public sphere. *Social Dynamics*, 36(1), 38-51.
- Renold, E. (2006). "They won't let us play... unless you're going out with one of them": Girls, boys and Butler's "heterosexual matrix" in the primary years. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 27(4), 489-509.
- Retief, G. (1994). Keeping Sodom out of the laager: The policing of sexual minorities in South Africa. In M. Gevisser, & E. Cameron (Eds.), *Defiant desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa* (pp. 99-111). Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Reynolds, J., Wetherell, M., & Taylor, S. (2007). Choice and chance: Negotiating agency in narratives of singleness. *The Sociological Review*, 55(2), 331-351.
- Rhoads, R. A. (1997). A subcultural study of gay and bisexual college males: Resisting developmental inclinations. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 68(4), 460-482.
- Rivers, I. (2002). Developmental issues for lesbian and gay youth. In A. Coyle, & C. Kitzinger (Eds.), *Lesbian and gay psychology: New perspectives* (pp. 30-43). Oxford: BPS Blackwell.

- Rivers, I., & Taulke-Johnson, R. (2002). Listening to lesbian, gay and bisexual students on-campus: Experiences of living in university accommodation. *Journal of Institutional Research*, 11(2), 14-23.
- Robus, D., & Macleod, C. (2006). "White excellence and black failure": The reproduction of racialised higher education in everyday talk. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 36(3), 463-480.
- Roulston, K., deMarrais, K., & Lewis, J. B. (2003). Learning to interview in the social sciences. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9, 643-667.
- Rust, P. (1992). The politics of sexual identity: Sexual attraction and behavior among lesbian and bisexual women. *Social Problems*, 39(4), 366-386.
- Rust, P. (1993). "Coming out" in the age of social constructionism: Sexual identity formation among lesbian and bisexual women. *Gender and Society*, 7(1), 50-77.
- Rydström, J. (2005). Solidarity – with whom? The international gay and lesbian rights movement and apartheid. In N. Hoad, K. Martin, & G. Reid (Eds.), *Sex and politics in South Africa* (pp. 34-53). Cape Town: Double Storey Books.
- Sarbin, T. R. (1998). Believed-in imaginings: A narrative approach. In T. R. Sarbin (Ed.), *Believed-in imaginings: The narrative construction of reality* (pp. 15-30). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1990). *Epistemology of the closet*. Berkeley, CA: University of California.
- Seedat, M., & MacKenzie, S. (2008). The triangulated development of South African psychology: Race, scientific racism and professionalisation. In C. van Ommen, & D. Painter (Eds.), *Interiors: A history of psychology in South Africa* (pp. 63-91). Cape Town: University of South Africa.
- Seidman, I. E. (1991). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Teachers College.
- Seidman, S. (2004a). Are we all in the closet? Notes toward a sociological and cultural turn in queer theory. In R. Friedland, & J. Mohr (Eds.), *Matters of culture: Cultural psychology in practice* (pp. 255-269). Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Seidman, S. (2004b). *Beyond the closet: The transformation of gay and lesbian life*. New York: Routledge.
- Seidman, S., Meeks, C., & Traschen, F. (1999). Beyond the closet? The changing social meaning of homosexuality in the United States. *Sexualities*, 2, 9-34.
- Shepard, B. (2009). History, narrative, and sexual identity: Gay liberation and postwar movements for sexual freedom in the United States. In P. L. Hammack, & B. J. Cohler (Eds.), *The*

- story of sexual identity: Narrative perspectives on the gay and lesbian life course* (pp. 23-48). New York: Oxford.
- Smart, B. (1985). *Michel Foucault*. London: Tavistock.
- Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (2008). Contrasting perspectives on narrating selves and identities: An invitation to dialogue. *Qualitative Research*, 8(5), 5-35.
- Sophie, J. (1985). A critical examination of stage theories of lesbian identity development. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 12(2), 39-51.
- Squire, C. (2005). Reading narratives. *Group Analysis*, 38(1), 91-107.
- Squire, C., Andrews, M., & Tamboukou, M. (2008). What is narrative research?. In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research* (pp. 1-21). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Stein, T. S. (1996). The essentialist/social constructionist debate about homosexuality and its relevance for psychotherapy. In R. P. Cabaj, & T. S. Stein (Eds.), *Textbook of homosexuality and mental health* (pp. 83-99). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric.
- Stevens, Jr., R. A. (2004). Understanding gay identity development within the college environment. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(2), 185-206.
- Steyn, M., & van Zyl, M. (2009). The prize and the price. In M. Steyn, & M. van Zyl (Eds.), *The prize and the price: Shaping sexualities in South Africa* (pp. 3-17). Cape Town: HSRC.
- Swarr, A. (2009). "Stabane", intersexuality, and same-sex relationships in South Africa. *Feminist Studies*, 35(3), 524-548.
- Swarr, A. L., & Nagar, R. (2003). Dismantling assumptions: Interrogating "lesbian" struggles for survival in India and South Africa. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 29(2), 491-516.
- Swigonski, M. E. (1995). Claiming a lesbian identity as an act of empowerment. *Affilia*, 10(4), 413-425.
- Tamboukou, M. (2008). A Foucauldian approach to narratives. In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research* (pp. 102-120). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Taylor, S. (2003). A place for the future?. Residence and continuity in women's narratives of their lives. *Narrative Inquiry*, 13(1), 193-215.
- Taylor, S. (2005a). Self-narration as rehearsal: A discursive approach to the narrative formation of identity. *Narrative Inquiry*, 15(1), 45-50.

- Taylor, S. (2005b). Identity trouble and place of residence in women's life narratives. In N. Kelly, D. Robinson, C. Horrocks, & B. Roberts (Eds.), *Narrative, memory and everyday life* (pp. 97–106). Huddersfield: The University of Huddersfield.
- Taylor, S. (2006). Narrative as construction and discursive resource. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 94–102.
- Taylor, S., & Littleton, K. (2006). Biographies in talk: A narrative-discursive research approach. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 2(1), 22–38.
- Troiden, R. R. (1988). *Gay and lesbian identity: A sociological analysis*. New York: General Halls.
- Ussher, J. M., & Mooney-Somers, J. (2000). Negotiating desire and sexual subjectivity: Narratives of young Lesbian Avengers. *Sexualities*, 3, 183–200.
- Ward, J., & Winstanley, D. (2005). Coming out at work: Performativity and the recognition and renegotiation of identity. *Sociological Review*, 53(3), 447–475.
- Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage.
- Wetherell, M. (1998). Positioning and interpretative repertoires: Conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. *Discourse and Society*, 9(3), 387–412.
- Wilbraham, L. (1997). The psychologisation of monogamy in advice columns: Surveillance, subjectivity and resistance. In A. Levett, A. Kottler, E. Burman, & I. Parker. (Eds.), *Culture, power and difference: Discourse analysis in South Africa* (pp. 65–81). Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Whitman, J. S., Cormier, S., & Boyd, C. J. (2000). Lesbian identity management at various stages of the coming out process: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*, 5(1), 3–18.

Appendix 1: E-mail to potential participants

ATTENTION FEMALE RHODES STUDENTS

My name is Alexandra Gibson and I am currently in the second year of my Master of Arts in Psychology. My supervisor is the head of the Psychology department, Professor Catriona Macleod, and my co-supervisor is Dr Clifford van Ommen. I am looking for female volunteers to participate in my research project. The aim of this project is to analyse how lesbians' sexual identities are constructed through the stories they tell.

Successful volunteers will be asked to participate in two individual (private) interviews, each lasting about 60-90 minutes. These will take place at a time and venue convenient to the participant.

For anyone who is interested in participating in the project, the criteria for inclusion are that you:

- are female,
- are registered with Rhodes University,
- identify as lesbian, and
- have told at least one or two people in your life about your sexual orientation.

Attached to this e-mail is a short questionnaire, which you must please fill out if you are at all interested in taking part in this study. This will not commit you to anything, but enables me, as the researcher, to identify participants from a range of backgrounds. Once you have returned this, I shall contact you to provide you with further information. Please note that all correspondence will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Please reply by: 1 June 2009

This project, including this advert, the proposal and the ethical aspects, has been reviewed by the RPRC (Research Projects & Ethics Review Committee) of the Psychology Department. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With thanks,
Alexandra Gibson
g04g0105@campus.ru.ac.za

Appendix 2: Preliminary questionnaire for involvement

Personal Details:

Name:

Age:

¹⁰Race:

Nationality:

Home language:

Degree (e.g. BA, BComm, BSc etc.):

Year of study:

Contact Details:

Cell number:

E-mail address:

The study will involve two sessions of individual interviews of a flexible duration (depending on time limits and content):

Session 1: 60-90 minute interview

Session 2: 30 minute interview

In this study your participation would be entirely anonymous, and a pseudonym (false name) of your choice would be used instead, and your real name will only be known by the researcher. Participation in this study is also entirely voluntary, which means that you can withdraw from the project, if you felt you had sufficient reason. The interviews will be tape-recorded, for the purposes of transcription, but these will be stored in a locked cabinet and will only be available to the researcher and supervisors. As this is for the purposes of a Master's thesis in Psychology, the findings of this study **will** be published and **will** be publicly available. This could include excerpts from the interviews, but your identity will be concealed with the use of the pseudonym that you choose.

¹⁰ Please note that the term 'race' is only used in this case, given the fact that it is still used in the context of South Africa and is not considered to be an essential identity label. Participants will therefore not be excluded or included merely based on this factor. Rather, it is used to recognise the multiple social factors upon which a person might construct their identity.

Speaking about one's experiences relating to one's sexual identity can be a positive experience. However, it could also be upsetting for some. Please be aware that the interviews will not be structured as therapeutic sessions. In the event that you wish to discuss any issues further, having taken part in the research, information will be provided on the relevant counsellors that can help.

Would you be prepared to speak to me about your experiences with regard to:

- ☐ Your sexual identity - how you see yourself as a lesbian woman; and
- ☐ Important events and people in your life (particularly at university) that you feel have shaped your sexual identity and how you view yourself?

If provided feedback on the analysis, would you be interested in reading and commenting on the researcher's interpretations? Yes / No

Please write a few lines about why you would be interested in taking part in such a study:

Thank you for filling out this questionnaire. Please note that you are not expected to commit to the study at this stage. You will, however, be notified whether or not your participation is initially needed. My e-mail address is listed below, if you have any queries or need further information about the study.

Alexandra Gibson

g04g0105@campus.ru.ac.za

Appendix 3: Consent Form



RHODES UNIVERSITY

Grahamstown • 6140 • South Africa

PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

AGREEMENT BETWEEN PARTICIPANT AND RESEARCHERS

I, _____, agree to participate in the research project of Alexandra Gibson concerning lesbians' accounts of coming out on a university campus.

I understand that:

- * The researcher is a student conducting research as part of the university requirements for a Master's-by-Thesis degree in Psychology and is supervised by Prof. Catriona Macleod and co-supervised by Dr Clifford van Ommen;
- * The research is about my experiences of developing a sexual orientation;
- * I should not volunteer to be part of the project if this topic would cause me any psychological distress;
- * My participation will involve an individual interview of three sub-sessions. The first will last about 60 minutes, then the second will last about 20-30 minutes, and then a follow-up interview will last roughly 30-60 minutes;
- * I am invited to express any concerns that I have concerning my participation to the researcher and to have them addressed to my satisfaction;
- * I am free to withdraw from the project at any time. However, I commit myself to full participation unless some unusual circumstances occur or I have concerns about my participation that I did not originally anticipate;
- * The report on the project may contain information concerning my experiences and thoughts on coming out, but the report will be designed in such a way that it will not be possible for the reader to identify me;
- * I understand that my identity will be protected with a pseudonym, and that details of the interview will only be used for the purpose of the project;
- * The session will be recorded. These recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and an assistant, who will also sign a confidentiality form. No person other than the researcher's supervisor will have access to the recordings, which will be kept in a safe, locked cabinet for the next 5 years.

Signature of Participant:

Date:

Signature of Researcher:

Appendix 4: Transcription codes

34. A	the line number and first initial of the speaker's name/pseudonym
[]	overlapping speech
(())	non-spoken action/additional information/information changed for anonymity
(.1)	signifies a pause (.1 = 1 second, .2 = 2 seconds, etc.)
(...)	inaudible speech
(!)	emphasis placed on the word (e.g. so(!) angry)
=	run-on line (where two speakers overlap)
[...]	break in extract presented for the purposes of space

Appendix 5: Interview guidelines

Preliminary information

- Provide basic information on the project
- Explain ethical guidelines: informed consent, confidentiality, consequences

Initial question

Please tell me how you came to identify as lesbian and describe your experiences during this time?

Questions based on various themes: Coming out audiences

- Can you describe the first time that you disclosed your sexuality?
- What was it that made you decide to tell someone about your sexuality?
- How did [the person] react?
- How did you feel after you told them?
- Can you describe what it was like between you and [this person] after you told him/her?
What is it like now?
- Have there been any other people that you have told about your sexuality?

Reactions

- What was it like when you told [person] about your sexuality?
- How did it feel when [he/she] reacted in that way?

Life in heteronormative world – home

- Can you describe your family for me – parents & siblings; culture/religion; what is it like at home?
- Who in your family knows about your sexual identity?
- Whether you are open about your sexuality or not, what is it like being at home as a lesbian?
- If you have disclosed to family members or friends back home, what are your relationships like now?
- What is it like in your home town?
- How have you experienced being lesbian in the community?

Community

- How have you found being lesbian generally in South Africa?

- Can you describe what it's like when you're in a public a) by yourself and/or b) with a partner?

University

- What was it like when you first came to university?
- What is it like being lesbian at this university?
- How involved are you in the LGBTI society/community at Rhodes?
- Can you describe any experiences within the university where you have found that your sexuality has been supported or accepted, or moments where it hasn't been?
- What has it been like living in [residence/digs] while you've been at Rhodes?
- How have you found other students react towards lesbian or gay students?
- How have you personally found Rhodes as a university institution, in other words, have you found it supportive or not of who you are?

Sexual identity and (non)disclosure

- How do you feel about your sexual identity?
- Can you describe what it has been like when you've met someone new (either at university or elsewhere) who does not know about your sexual identity?

Strategies of (non)disclosure

- Can you think of, and describe, a situation more recently when you told someone about your sexuality?
- Can you describe any moments/contexts where you express your identity differently?
- Can you describe any times/situations when you decide or have decided not to disclose your sexuality?

Conclusion of interview

- Do you have anything further to add?
- Do you have any questions about the project or my own experiences?
- How did you feel taking part in this interview?